THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1985

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS
THIS ISSUE: 1985

★ FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER ★

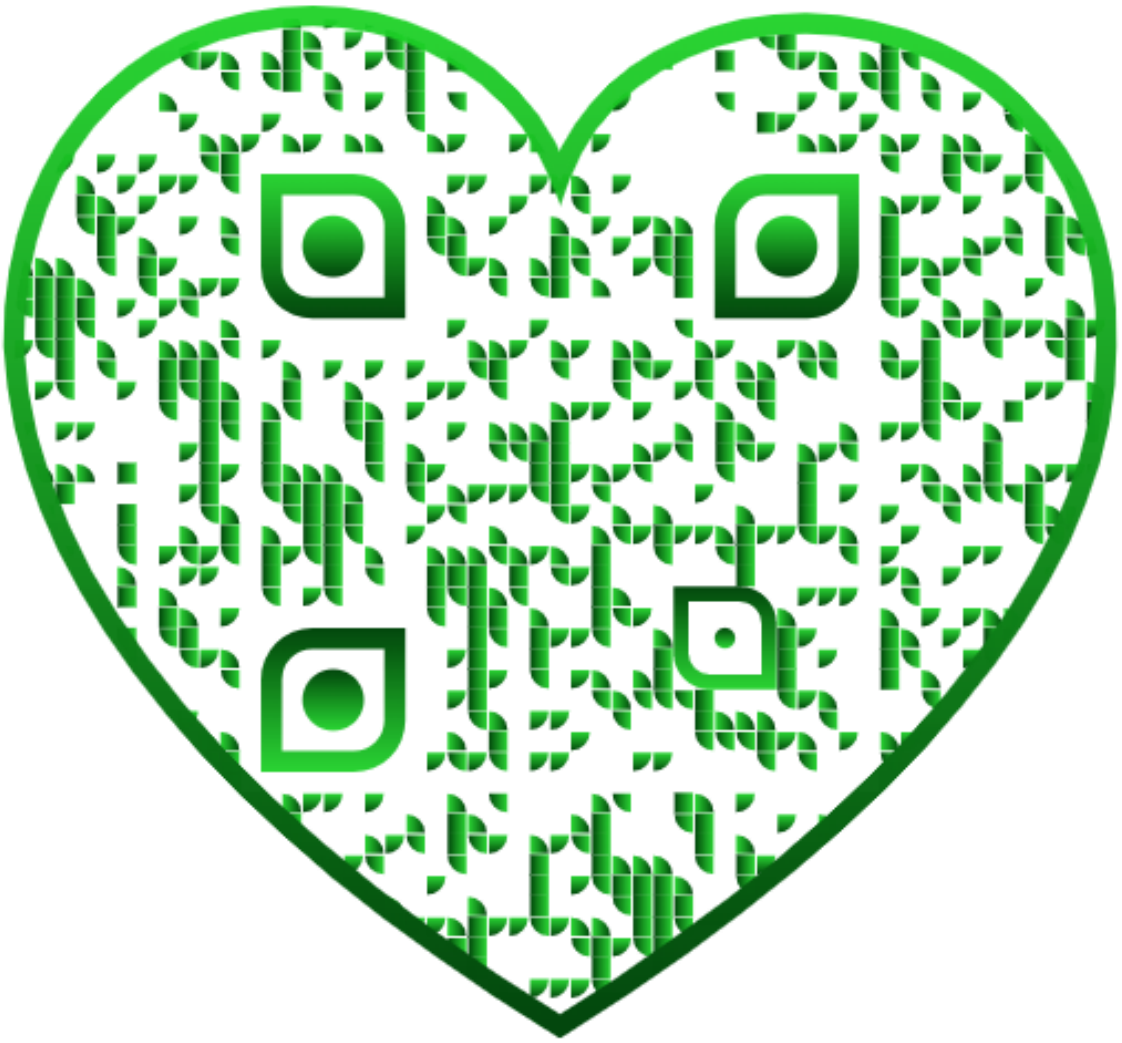
TOM WAITS

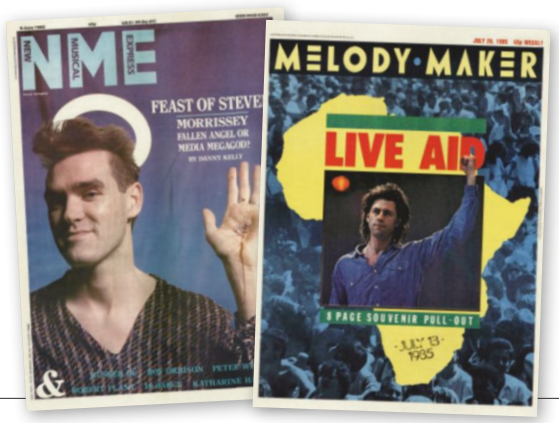
"It's better to burn hard than rot"

STARRING...

THE SMITHS
REM
THE CURE
DEXYS
KATE BUSH
NEIL YOUNG
ROBERT PLANT
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
JONI MITCHELL

PLUS! PAUL WELLER | JESUS & MARY CHAIN | TOM PETTY | HÜSKER DÜ





Welcome to 1985

TOM PETTY RELEASES a song called "Spike" in 1985, and in it he makes an observation that holds up pretty well for the entire year: "*The future ain't what it used to be.*"

As ever with Petty, it's a smart remark you can take a couple of ways, but however you do, it says something about change. He might mean to convey a disappointment with the world's prospects. He might equally be rejecting glossy modernity in music, and advocating a more heartfelft mode.

1985 has supporters of both these positions. Enduring performers like Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, Robert Plant and our cover star Tom Waits display the same restless creativity deep into their careers as they did at the start – they're always the same, but always different.

Younger blood is also much in evidence this year. Hüsker Dü, The Jesus And Mary Chain, Run DMC, The Pogues, The Cure and The Cult are among those to take something from the past and adapt it for their own ends. So determined is Kevin Rowland from Dexys to move things on, he runs the risk of leaving his fans and the record business behind completely.

Then there are those who see their work as a shoulder to a larger wheel. Billy Bragg is working with the British Labour party. Paul Weller remains alert and engaged. Then, when Bob Geldof announces Live Aid in June, the event motivates the rock world to stir itself across its genres and generations to help alleviate the suffering caused by the Ethiopian famine.

This is the world of *The History Of Rock*, a monthly magazine which follows each turn of the rock revolution. Whether in sleazy dive or huge arena, passionate and stylish contemporary reporters were there to chronicle events. This publication reaps the benefits of their understanding for the reader decades later, one year at a time. Missed one? You can find out how to rectify that on page 144.

In the pages of this 21st edition, dedicated to 1985, you will find verbatim articles from frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever it may be.

On the bus with Neil Young, learning about David Crosby's drug problems. Hearing how Mick Jagger fished a paparazzo out from under a hedge and gave him a cup of tea. At an art gallery with Joni Mitchell, hearing how life has treated Jack Nicholson.

"It's been pretty fucking good," Jack says. It's the kind of year to make you look back and agree with him.

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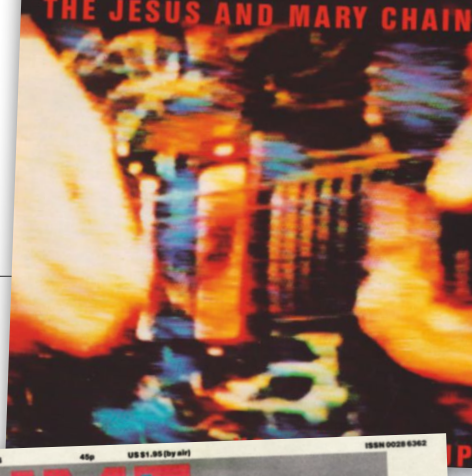

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THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, 3rd Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU | **EDITOR** John Mulvey, whose favourite song from 1985 is *This Is What She's Like by Dexys Midnight Runners* **DEPUTY EDITOR** John Robinson *Paintwork by The Fall* **ART EDITOR** Lora Findlay *Primitive Painters by Felt* **PRODUCTION EDITOR** Mike Johnson *Nine While Nine by The Sisters Of Mercy* **ART DIRECTOR** Marc Jones *West End Girls by Pet Shop Boys* **DESIGNER** Becky Redman *Close To Me by The Cure* **PICTURE EDITOR** Phil King *Never Understand by The Jesus And Mary Chain* **COVER PHOTO** Alen MacWeeney/Getty **THANKS TO** Helen Spivak **MARKETING** Charlotte Treadaway **SUBSCRIPTIONS** Rachel Wallace **GENERAL MANAGER** Jo Smalley **GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR** Paul Cheal **COVERS AND TEXT PRINTED BY** Wyndeham Group | **WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK**

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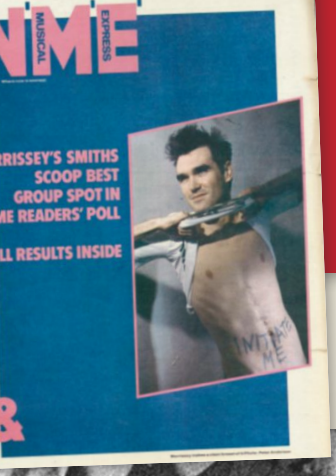


1985

JANUARY – MARCH

RUN DMC, THE SMITHS, MICK JAGGER, TEARS FOR FEARS AND MORE

March 15, 1985: gig-goers trash the PA at The Jesus And Mary Chain's North London Polytechnic show

Arrests made

MM MAR 23 Uproar at a Jesus And Mary Chain show. Support band attacked!

AN ESTIMATED £8,000 damage was caused when violence erupted once again at a Jesus And Mary Chain gig. Police were called to the North London Poly in Holloway Road twice on Friday night when crowd behaviour got out of control. By the end of the night four people had been taken to hospital. Two were kept in overnight.

Trouble began early in the evening when fire officers from the GLC ruled that the doors should be shut once the 600 ticket-holders had gone inside. Police arrived to disperse a crowd of 400 people who were left outside. Inside the theatre, support band Jasmine Minks were forced offstage after being attacked by the crowd. The Jesus And Mary Chain followed them on, but went back off after about 20 minutes when their amps packed up.

Poly promoter Tony Sawcyn said the group refused to return to the stage, at which point the crowd "went berserk". They began hurling bottles and cans, then pulled down the PA rig and ripped down the curtains. The police were called again and arrests were made.

"I suspect that this could be the last event at the theatre for quite a while," he said.

STEVE CALLAGHAN / REX FEATURES

Spandau Ballet on Channel 4 pop show *The Tube* in 1985

"Dissatisfaction"

NME FEB 23 Spandau Ballet want out of their record contract.

SPANDAU BALLET ARE involved in a massive bust-up with their record company Chrysalis, and have issued a writ against the label which effectively alleges negligence.

Spandau want to be released from their current contract, which has over a year to run, and according to Chrysalis the issue will come to court, though a hearing hasn't yet been set. Since the matter is now *sub judice*, we can only print the official statements from the two parties.

Spandau's solicitor claims: "Their recent writ served against their record company Chrysalis is a direct result of their dissatisfaction over the company's failure to honour its contract to support and promote the group as agreed. They have also been disenchanted with the management at Chrysalis, and they feel the quarrels between the ownership have worsened the situation.

"Overall, they feel they have not enjoyed the support to which a band of their proven stature and success are entitled. They are estimated to be currently responsible for 25 per cent of Chrysalis sales alone. They recently broke all box-office records prior to Christmas by selling out six successive Wembley dates and a UK tour."

"They recently broke all box-office records prior to Christmas"

The response from Chrysalis is somewhat more terse: "The World Parade tour continues through Europe and Australia over the next three months, and Chrysalis Records are continuing as usual to promote their successful international record career."

Spandau's publicity has previously been in the hands of the Chrysalis Press Office, but they have now taken on an independent publicist, Keith Altham – who's been associated with the Rolling Stones and The Police, among others.

REX FEATURES, TIM RONEY / GETTY

Rick Allen: lost arm driving his Corvette Stingray on New Year's Eve

Arm amputation proved necessary

NME JAN 12 Def Leppard drummer seriously injured in a car crash.

DEF LEPPARD DRUMMER Rick Allen, who was involved in a road crash on New Year's Eve, was taken to Sheffield's Royal Hallamshire Hospital at the weekend and he is now out of intensive care – surgeons had to amputate his arm last Friday, having previously reattached it when it was severed in the accident.

The crash occurred in the early hours of the morning, when Allen's Corvette Stingray hit a wall in Rivelin Road, Sheffield, after failing to take a bend. Allen was thrown from the car, his left arm completely severed just below the shoulder, while his Dutch fiancée, Miriam Barendsen, remained trapped in the vehicle, suffering some facial injuries.

Ambulance men rushed to the scene, and after recovering the severed arm, took Allen to hospital where Mr Robert Page, the Royal Hallamshire's microvascular surgeon, reattached the limb in a 10-hour operation. Later in the week, however, the upper arm became infected and amputation proved necessary. The hospital issued a statement claiming that, while Allen was still extremely ill, his condition had stabilised and there were signs of improvement, even though it would be some time before the success of the operation could be fully determined.

A spokesman for Def Leppard's record company, Phonogram, said on Monday that, it was "too early to comment on Rick's playing future. The band are obviously desperately upset." But the drum tracks for their new LP had been completed before the tragedy.

Since the accident, the Royal Hallamshire has been inundated with hundreds of telephone calls, telegrams, get-well cards and letters, many from the USA, where Def Leppard – Grammy Award winners last year with their Pyromania album – are regarded as superstars.

"Build together"

NME FEB 23 Billy Bragg and Labour leader Neil Kinnock join forces to try and engage Britain's first-time voters.

IT COULD HAVE been the inaugural meeting of Redheads Against Thatcherism – Billy Bragg, the big-nosed bastard from Barking, and Rockin' Neil Kinnock, man of letters and leader of the Labour party, brewing up together inside the hallowed portals of the House Of Commons. It was in fact the launch of Labour's New Jobs And Industry Campaign, one facet of which is a series of live dates in March by His Braggship under the umbrella of "Jobs For Youth".

Such direct party-political sponsorship is rare in rock music, and the gigs – in addition to exposing the way jobs and communities are being destroyed by the Tories – aim to help focus attention on Labour's policies for the young in the hope of capturing a larger slice of the youth vote at the next election.

Prior to the official Bragg 'n' Kinnock press conference in the shadow cabinet room, your on-the-spot *NME* parliamentary lobbyist grabbed this exclusive interview with the dynamic duo. One of the intentions of the campaign, both emphasised, was to present young voters with left wing policies in a palatable and imaginative manner.

Says Bragg: "It's giving them the choice between living in a caring society and the present selfish society. One of the reasons that so many first-time voters went for the Conservatives last time was that they were never presented with a proper argument by the left. They went for Thatcher because there was no proper alternative."

Adds Kinnock: "It's been true for a long time that Labour have failed to capitalise on the youth vote. But, as the opinion polls testify, we now have the majority of the youth support. The vested interests of youth and the Labour Party are the same. We either build together or go down together."

So where do Billy Bragg and the Jobs For Youth tour come into this bid to galvanise youth support?

Bragg: "Basically, it's political sponsorship. We're not going to ram it down people's throats. The gigs are going to be like any other Billy Bragg gigs, except the Labour party are going to be there. The party will have a very high profile in that there will be MPs and other people will be able to put Labour policies under the microscope. Kids can come up and ask what the party is doing and isn't doing and find out where they fit in."

To a lot of first-time voters, politics conjures up stuffy and boring images. Are these gigs an attempt to rectify that to Labour's benefit?

Bragg: "The image of the party among young voters is one of smoke-filled rooms and all that. Maybe now, with a younger man leading the party in Neil, the opportunity is there to build towards the next election by getting through to the 15- and 16-year-olds who will be the first-time voters when the election comes around."

Kinnock: "But what we're doing now isn't new. It's new to this generation, but back at the turn of the century the people who began the trade union and socialist movement were very keen to put their ideas across in the most attractive and digestible way.

"It's only over the last 40 years that politics have become as dowdy and enclosed as they are now. In the '20s and '30s, and certainly before the First World War, a lot of imagination went into the presentation of political ideas."

So why haven't the Labour Party put their name to a tour like this before?

Kinnock: "People in politics have been afraid of it. They've been afraid of rock music. It's a question of values. There was a very talented Geordie musician who had a pretty strong profile for us in the early '70s, and by 1979, when he was very successful, he began writing newspaper articles saying why he voted Conservative. It was a complete cop-out and it took him another two years to realise that he was completely wrong. But he swung back again and now he is lending his support to us.

> **"People in politics have been afraid of rock music. It's a question of values"**

"In so far as rock has been related to politics, that is the process it has gone through. There was a phase of false sophistication, of not being involved. Then there was a swing to the right – every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost.

"Now musicians are beginning to realise what a load of nonsense that was. The government might be making generous offers to get all the tax exiles back, but when the tax exiles discover that the kids in their audience are now on the dole, the more intelligent ones are linking it up and discovering that there's something wrong. It's starting to move a bit and they're becoming politicised through that."

Mr Kinnock's theories might contradict the undercurrent of Toryism that runs through a lot of modern music, the images of glamour and success through capitalism that permeate most current chart pop, but the Bragg tour is rooted in more direct radicalism, aiming to educate and eventually mobilise British youth politically. The only recent analogy is perhaps the campaign to save the GLC, which enjoyed huge public support in its musical manifestations, although Kinnock, himself a founder member of the Anti-Nazi League, traces things back further to the RAR gigs of the late '70s. "To some extent we are the grain," he concludes. "Youngsters are asking a lot of questions about jobs, the economy, the bomb, the environment, racism, housing and the future. Those questions are coming up without prodding. We want them to know that there is a party listening to those questions prepared to give them reasoned answers.

"They are not looking for miracles. They are looking for people with constructive answers who are going to work damn hard to apply those answers. They don't want reassurance. They want to know that their opinions are being taken into account."

One last thing. Where do Tracey Ullman videos come into all this?

"Listen, Tracey's politics are as sound as her talent," Kinnock states. "She's 100 per cent, that girl. Great."

No answer to that one. *Adrian Thrills*

June 22, 1985: Billy Bragg at The Longest Day concert in Milton Keynes and (inset) Neil Kinnock

GETTY, MIKE CAMERON / GETTY

REDHEADS UNDER THE BEDS

Adrian Thrills interviews the new

Kirsty MacColl: "I never got any kick out of playing live"

"I haven't really been ambitious"

NME JAN 12 Introducing a singer-songwriter from the Stiff family... Kirsty MacColl.

EVERY SO OFTEN Kirtsy MacColl interrupts her career as a songwriter to issue a sparkling single. Her original of "They Don't Know About Us", made with the great Liam "*Akron Compilation*" Sternberg, was perfect – almost as good as The Shirelles.

A version of The Beach Boys' "You Believe In Me" backed with her own "Queen Of The High Teas", was another good offering which got lost in a glut of useless vinyl. Happily, the latter had not escaped the notice of Billy Bragg, who at the time of its release was working in a second-hand record shop. So when Kirsty approached him to do a version of "A New England", old Bill was only too happy to oblige.

"I got to see Bill a few times last year; I really liked him and I wanted to have a go at 'New England'. I approached him and said we'd need another verse because it was too short to release as a single. So he dashed off a new one, no problem."

Produced by her husband, Steve Lillywhite, the result is the last Brit pop classic of '84 and the first of '85 – skittering beat, bright guitars, sweetened voice, soured love and social ills.

It relates as much to Kirsty's working-class, O-level, shoplifting, teenage years in Croydon as it does to Bragg's Barking background. It was there that she first started writing songs "to escape the boredom". A stint with the ill-fated, drastically named Drug Addix curtailed her ambitions and her taste for rawck and rowl.

"I never got any kick out of playing live. I could never understand people moaning about wanting to get back on the road.

"It was one of the most horrible experiences I ever had."

Her first one-off single with Stiff, "They Don't Know", faded in a distribution strike. She then had a short liaison with Polydor before returning to Dave Robinson's new, improved happy house, had a hit with the disappointing "There's A Guy Works Down The Chip Shop Swears He's Elvis", and more success with Tracy Ullman covering her songs. As a recording artist she's sought to sustain her own career.

"I haven't really been that ambitious. Plus, I don't do live gigs because live I don't reproduce the sound I get on record. The sound depends on there being 12 of my vocals at any given time.

"My voice sounds great the more of it there is, but in just a single part it sounds terrible."

It was during some supplementary session work as a backing vocalist on the last LP by Simple Minds (her favourite group!) that she met Steve Lillywhite. On "New England" he seems to have got a much cleaner, fresher sound than he usually does with the Messiah men of rock.

"People always say that. They call him the U2 producer – they forget he'd done a lot of other different things. He can't apply the same technique to me as he would to a rock band, because I'm a solo artist.

"I have a totally different voice to any of the men he works with, so I'm not suddenly going to sound like Big Country."

A relief and no mistake.

Lillywhite's contract on Frida Abba's second LP has benefitted Kirsty.

"If I'd ever thought when I was at school, bopping along to 'Dancing Queen', that someday I'd be working with someone out of Abba!

"Well, we were all in awe of her. When we did harmonies together I kept thinking I should be the blonde one."

"I told Billy we'd need another verse as 'A New England' was too short to release as a single"

Kirsty and Steve expect their first baby in February. At the moment she finds pregnancy hinders her creativity.

"I feel totally fazed all the time; it's had as much effect on me mentally as it's had on my figure. So I hope to get down to some serious work when I've had it."

But in future recording she'd still rather do covers.

"That way you have someone else to blame. I find it a lot easier to enjoy doing cover versions than my own stuff, because it's always more nerve-racking when you're closer to it.

"I also find it hard to imagine a different way of doing it."

And in February is Kirsty hoping for anything in particular?

"I don't mind, as long as it's a baby."

Gavin Martin

ALAMY

SHRINK RAP!

JOHN PEEL

MM JAN 26

The Radio 1 DJ undergoes the *Maker*'s talking therapy.

John Peel: "I'd like to have more vices, actually"

Everton

I was pleased they won the cup last year. Obviously, I'd have preferred it if Liverpool had done it, but I think increasingly these days it's Liverpool against the world. Quite clearly you can't have Tottenham winning the title in any decently ordered society, so if Liverpool can't do it, I'd rather have Everton win it than anyone else.

Blood sports

They killed a fox at the top of our garden last year, which I was absolutely furious about. What appals me is the arrogance of the people, and when I phoned up to complain about it, I was told that if I didn't want the hunt on my land, I should have notified them in advance, which seemed to me an extraordinary new principle in criminology – if you don't wanna be burgled, let me know and I won't burgle you. My wife, a wonderful woman, parked the car across the driveway so that they couldn't turn their cars round, and to our immense satisfaction, one of the hunt followers put his Volvo estate in the ditch.

Virtues

I'm tempted to be a real smartass and say "Guitar Boogie Shuffle", which was a hit for The Virtues in the 1950s, but... I suppose my only virtue is obsession. Walters would say it's obsession, anyway; just a determination to keep up with all the stuff that goes on to the point of feeling guilty if I don't, to an almost unhealthy degree. I'd like to have more vices, actually. I wish I was more capable of enjoying myself, because I don't really enjoy myself a lot. That's gonna look rather pathetic written down, but I tend to always be the bloke at the party who ends up sitting on the stairs that everybody has to climb over to get to the loo and things.

Thursdays

Ah, well, yes... I don't listen to the radio on Thursday evenings. I would have been happier if the programme had been replaced with something vaguely contemporary rather than the sounds of the '70s. The argument was used that they thought they'd try a different kind of music at that time of night, but they don't seem to be showing any signs of trying a different kind of music on Mike Read's show or Simon Bates' programme, so wonder why it's my little area that comes under siege on these occasions. I still feel a bit bitter about it.

Top Of The Pops

I quite like doing it, I must admit. When I first did one, about Christmas three years ago, a lot of people wrote in and said, "Hey man, you've sold out", and I'm a great believer in selling out. I don't like people telling me how to order my life, so when they asked me to do them on a fairly regular basis, I thought I would. My kids quite like seeing me on there and the formula's so tight, it has a curious purity of its own. There's something endearingly provincial about it- I don't think people feel threatened, I don't think the fashion is so fashionable or the dancing so extraordinary that people feel in any way excluded by it.

Kid Jensen

I miss him a lot, I really do. Of all the people I've worked with on Radio 1, he's the one that I liked best, so I was very, very sad. I wish he hadn't gone. I still think he made a mistake, actually.

Beards

I grew it years ago, when I was about 26, 27, and I tried a couple of rather bizarre sculpted forms which now look ludicrous in the photographs. I grew it really because whenever I shaved my neck I looked as though I'd been trying to commit suicide. I have very, very soft skin and there's an appalling blood-letting every time I shave, so I thought I'd grow a beard because it was alright at the time, and it wasn't until about five years ago that I tried removing it. Well, bearing in mind that I was not a great-looking bloke but a reasonably Christ-like-looking fellow who disappeared behind it when I was 27, when I got it all off, there was my mother – well, more a mixture between my mother and Mussolini, and the effect was, frankly, horrifying. So I'm rather stuck with it now, and my wife won't let me shave it off anyway because my children would be frightened if I did.

Washing-up

We bought a dishwasher about six months ago because my brother Frank's wife had always been saying we ought to get one. And we thought it was a load of middle-class nonsense, but it actually does make life a lot easier – particularly if you've got four kids. I quite like washing-up – I'm very slow, very methodical and I polish everything. It's quite therapeutic, like vacuuming or doing the boiler, which are the other things that I do.

Fashion

Never been a fashionable bloke, never had the figure for it. I'd like to be fashionable, but I think one of the reasons people are prepared to put up with a 45-year-old father of four droning away on the radio and playing what people always say is "young people's music" is because I don't try to be anything else. Quite clearly, when punk started, if I'd gone wobbling about in bondage gear, people would very quickly have said, "We don't want any more of this twerp."

Heroes

I've got an unlikely bunch of heroes. One which I've never actually admitted to publicly before. When I was a kid, bearing in mind that my background is impeccably middle-class and extremely rural, I didn't have any friends really because I lived so far away from anyone else that I just pottered about on my own. And one of my first heroes was George VI because I knew that he had this very severe speech impediment which he'd had to overcome. People always think it's funny, but I really admired him. He made a speech, I think, in maybe the first year of the war, and if I hear a recording of it, it still moves me to tears – the one about the man standing at the gate of the year. I've no time for the royal family really, but as an individual I admired him enormously, I must say. And then, after that, my first big boyhood idol was Billy Liddell, who played for Liverpool for 21, 22 years. One of the very few people whose autograph I ever got. It's always been footballers, basically – Dalglish – and actors: Margaret Rutherford, Alastair Sim and Phil Silvers, obviously, because he's fashionable at the moment.

US comedy actor Phil Silvers: "fashionable"

NEIL MATTHEWS / REX FEATURES

"Business is booming"

In a university dorm room, a rap dynasty is emerging. *NME* travels to New York to interview wordsmiths RUN DMC, along the way meeting producers Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons – the brains behind Def Jam. "The street wants something specific," says Simmons.

— NME MARCH 9 —

LAST WEEK IN New York I was told to go and meet a tubby 23-year-old record producer called Rick Rubin. Rick studies video at New York University and estimates that he hasn't attended one class in the last 10 months. He's not that bothered. He's pretty certain that he'll graduate at the end of the year.

He lives on campus in a tiny cramped room which has difficulty accommodating his possessions, let alone his roommate's. Every available space is taken up. Shelves are stacked high with records, books and tapes, the floor is covered with clothes and those all-important Nike training shoes.

It is from here that Rick runs Def Jam Records. His boss, Russell Simmons, operates from the other side of town. But he's involved in so many other projects that to all intents and purposes Room 203, on the eighth floor of BNYU's residential hall, *is* Def Jam.

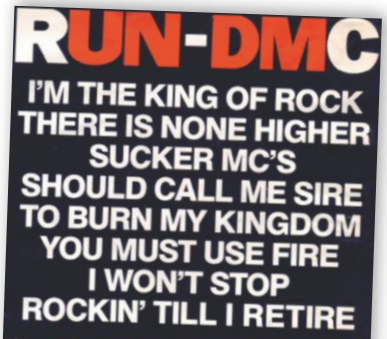
So far Rick has produced and overseen the release of three singles: LL Cool J's "I Need A Beat", the wild "Rock Hard" by the Beastie Boys and "T LA Rock" by Jazzy Jay, three underground records that London's b-boys have cherished these last few months.

Rick has two more singles on hold, and when he plays you these he cranks up the volume to an almost unbearable level, sits in his chair and, with eyes tightly closed, concentrates on every sound and every detail with an almost manic intensity. When the tune finishes, Rick remains transfixed in this position for about 10 seconds and then… boom!… he'll snap out of it, smile, and change the record.

It's quite a nerve-wracking experience, but this is not the most remarkable thing about Rick Rubin, a white native New Yorker. No, the most remarkable thing about Rick is that when you ask him about music he'll tell you that his two favourite groups ever are Troublefunk, a go-go group from Washington, and… AC/DC. No kidding.

He thinks that there is no one to compete with Troublefunk's dense percussion attack or AC/DC's heavy guitars. His ambition, quite simply, is to merge the two together on his own records. To bring about a confrontation between the excess of rock and the sound of the beat box. And he is not the only one.

"I'm the King of ROCK / There is no HIGHER / Sucker MCs should call me SIRE / To burn my kingdom you must use FIRE / I won't stop rocking until I RETIRE!" – "King Of Rock", Run DMC »



GETTY

Their Adidas: (l–r) Jason "Jam Master Jay" Mizell, Darryl "DMC" McDaniels and Joseph "Run" Simmons in front of the Empire State Building, New York City, May 1985

IF THE FUNCTION of the white rock artist in the '60s and '70s, generally speaking, was to mercilessly beg, steal or borrow from primary black sources – you don't think Jagger made it by his lips alone? – the '80s has seen a dramatic reversal of those roles.

Of course, the white are still plundering like crazy, but in 1983, for the first time in years, it was a rock guitar that took a major black artist out of his already massive record sales and transported him to complete and utter worldwide domination. Michael Jackson's "Beat It", featuring Eddie Van Halen, virtually made Michael Jackson. It wasn't something that, say, Prince, the Isleys, Sly Stone or Hendrix hadn't attempted before. But it was by far the most complete integration yet.

What's followed since has been a variation on the theme, and none too clever at that. For a man of his talent, Prince is mostly slumming it with occasional flashes of genius, Tina Turner is Elaine Page in a mini skirt and only the odd blast like Cameo's "Talking Out The Side Of Your Neck" is any kind of indication as to what can be achieved.

But that's the mainstream, which ignores completely one area of black music: rap. Enter stage left Joe Simmons, Darryl McDaniels and Jay Mizell (DJ Jam Master Jay), collectively known as Run DMC.

In March 1982, Run DMC released a single called "It's Like That", a rap single that was not only a massive American hit but, as future singles such as "Rock Box" and "Hollis Crew" would prove, heralded a complete change around for the genre.

Run DMC's sound is a raw, brutal hammer. The emphasis is totally on the drums and voices. There is little melody and no lightness to Run DMC. At a time when rap was characterised by boring rhymes about fast cars, flash ladies and the amount of jewellery the rapper could wear in one day, and when musically it could do nothing except haul out the bassline from Chic's "Good Times", Run DMC stripped away all the basics and virtually reinvented the form for themselves.

At first hearing, you'll probably feel nothing.

The drums and staggered, splintered rhythms of the beat box seem nagging and incessant, dragging painfully. The voices sound bare and hectoring and the repetition feels unbearable.

It's music that needs perseverance. When you hear people saying it's a hard music, it's ten to one that they're using the word in its proper context and, unlike the majority, it upsets preconceptions because it is not strictly a dance music or an accessible music.

What it is? Basically, it's a blank rejection of *niceties*. The drums and voices are embellished with tiny, almost inaudible subtleties – anything from a synth line to some underplayed catchy percussion – that act as little hooks under the aggressive attack of Darryl and Joe's vocals.

Like heavy metal, it is relentless in its approach, and it is exactly that link which Run DMC were the first to spot. Most funk or soul records which try to incorporate a rock guitar usually end up sounding, well, just plain awkward. But with rap the mixture is perfect because the style and tempo – the recurring rhythms set against the loud recurring guitar – are compatible.

Run DMC use the guitar sparingly. They get hold of riffs that any two-bit guitar player has at some time in his life tried to play, and then incorporate it into their harsh, bleak sound, looping it endlessly, until the listener finally has to capitulate.

On their third single, "Rock Box", they got too carried away with themselves. But with their new LP, the title track "King Of Rock" and especially "Can You Rock It Like This?", Run DMC have come up with a striking formula that not only places them at the head of their field but is the logical conclusion of black meeting white and turning gold.

Lyrically, as well, they leave the others choking in the dust. At their best, Run DMC's raps use a wit and imagination that extends far beyond the cliched bragging that forms such a central part in this music.

Where "The Message" left off, "Hard Times" and "Wake Up" pick up. And in something like "30 Days", which deals with the varied hassles of the credit card, the boys aren't shy of including amusing concepts like lovers who "*If you don't like their ways / You can send back in 30 days*".

When they do brag about themselves (or their DJ, Jam Master Jay) they usually do it with one of the most self-deprecating tongues to be found in rap. "*If you mess with us you'll be a real short liver / You may be big but our bodyguard is bigger!*" They cannot be serious.

Over the timespan of two LPs, Run DMC undoubtedly wear you down. But they bear no shame. As the song goes, it's like that. And that's the way it is.

SEEMS THAT IT wasn't only Britain which went through some kind of positive change in 1977. Over at the Hotel Diplomat on 43rd Street, rap shows featuring Kurtis Blow, Flash, Melle Mel, etc, were being run every week. The promoter was one Russell Simmons. His younger brother, Joe, was also there. As a rapper, 12 years of age, he was billed as the Son Of Kurtis Blow.

Sometimes he would stand behind Kurtis, scratching and playing records for Kurtis' raps and then, toward the end of the show, he would take the mic and rap himself with Kurtis as the DJ. No rap record had yet been made. By 1980, at 15, he was on tour with The Commodores, who used Kurtis as a support act.

Simmons himself, like the music he creates, does not conform to the stereotype of the young New York rapper. He came from a middle-class family, went to a Catholic school and worked hard at his studies.

Darryl, his partner, was a straight-A student, which in English terms means he didn't flunk one exam. As Russell Simmons, now Run DMC's producer, remembers it, Darryl was a barometer as to how good a rap tune was.

"Darryl was a kid who used to come over my father's house and I used to play him Kurtis Blow records and he was like the funniest guy. He'd sit there with his hood up and do this rocking motion and sort of shake his head if it was good. And during the period when we had 'Throughout The Years' and some Blow records that were more commercial, he would sit there and listen and not shake his head. Kurtis and I would look at him and say, 'Oh shit, we're not going to sell any records.'"

Darryl and Joe met at junior high school, attended different high schools and met up again when Joe got in touch with Darryl about a rap he'd written. They began working together, playing the clubs and looking for a break.

> "People's parents are going to say, 'Turn that shit off!'"

That chance came in the form of Russell. From promoting shows he then made the transition from manager to producer of various rap artists. Russell took Joe and Darryl into the studio and cut "It's Like That" and "Sucker MCs".

Against all expectations, the single sold by the thousands. The follow-up, "Hard Times"/"Jam Master Jay", repeated the success and Darryl and Joe took leave of absence from the college they had enrolled in.

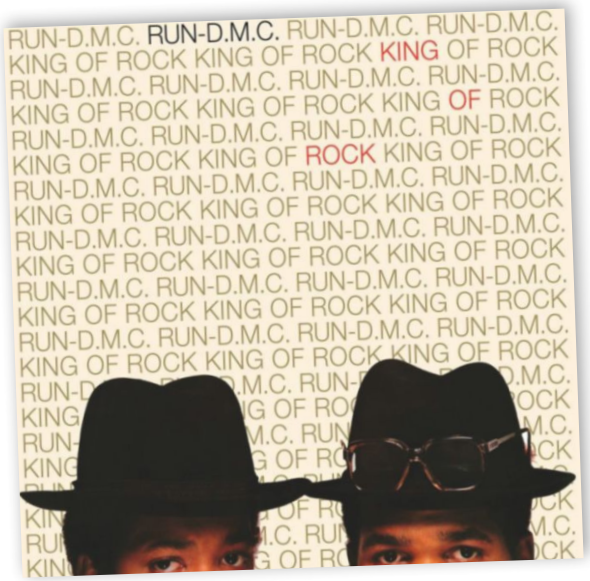
"We were there one minute," says Joe, "and we haven't been back yet. The business is booming."

Indeed it is. Their debut LP was the first rap record to go gold in America. "I wasn't surprised," Simmons says with modesty, "I thought it was real good."

In many ways it was the third single, "Rock Box", which proved to be the pivotal part of their career. Back in the early days, Joe would listen to rock records – Aerosmith, Billy Squier – and lift certain parts, namely the drums, to talk over.

"It wasn't on the radio station," he says, "but if we wanted to find a hard beat we would take the break part of the rock record, where it was just drums, and cut that over and over while we rapped."

It wasn't long before they were incorporating guitar parts. "We had to be creative," claims Simmons. "We don't like to make the same old thing every



time, because people are tired of hearing it."

In America at least, Eddie Martinez' extrovert guitar work on "Rock Box" – set against a barrage of rapping, scratching and percussion hooks – shoved Run DMC into the forefront of mainstream pop. It's estimated that the single has now sold over 800,000 copies, with as many whites as blacks queueing around the block for a copy.

"Rock Box" is hardly a soft item either. But it was enough to push Run DMC onto MTV, have Lou Reed use them as support and to be featured in as many rock papers as they were in the black press.

"We were selling vocals," claims producer Russell. "We figured we had very, very good rappers and we wanted people to appreciate what they did. We didn't want to overproduce them, we wanted *them*, and that's what we got. They wouldn't let us play music anyway, just wouldn't let us. We'd say, 'Put in a little melody here, a simple melody', and they'd say, 'Absolutely not.'"

Simmons grins. "Turned out they were right."

Run DMC see no disparity between this clash of styles. When I ask them about the mixture, they just shrug their shoulders. They haven't been brought up, unlike the British, to see any differences between white or black. If something sounds good, they'll use it and to hell with any contradictions.

"I don't like heavy metal too much," admits Russell. "I like AC/DC [!], but I don't like some of this new shit. 'King Of Rock' is probably more R'n'B than any other heavy metal stuff. It's simpler, that's what I like about it. It's more straightforward."

For Simmons, seven years older than his brother, the rock element is a way into making, what he terms "teenage records". He sees Run DMC as the new Jackson Five, but without the coy sweetness.

"They don't always have to be records that make people mad, but sometimes they have to. I mean people's parents are going to say, 'Turn that shit off! What the fuck are you playing upstairs?' That's what teenage records are. That *adds*.

"When Run [*Joe, so called because he 'runs' his mouth off; the DMC is Darryl's initials*] says, '*I'm the King of ROCK*," and that guitar comes… in the morning, if you're laying there in bed and you hear that, it fucks you up! I like that idea, I like that idea a lot."

Rick Rubin as himself in *Krush Groove*, the 1985 movie based on record label Def Jam's early days

IT'S TUESDAY MORNING in New York. Run DMC, having put the interview back a day, are an hour and a half late.

"Shall we go for a drink or something?" I ask them. They quickly sit down. "No man, let's do it now."

Interviews make them anxious, put them on edge. Run does most of the talking, but it's mainly one-liners, with Darryl throwing in the occasional observation. Things are made worse by my accent. When I ask them about a song of theirs called "Wake Up", they tell me sharply that they never made a song called "White Cup".

They dress in the current b-boy style. Straight-leg jeans and trainers with wide white laces left undone. When they walk they have to drag their feet. But it's the style.

They still live with their parents in Hollis, Queens. "Thus far it's no problem," says Run. Today they're mainly interested in England. Who are the big rap stars there? What are the big records?

I tell them that a lot of the rap tunes can only be picked on import. Consequently, a lot of what does get released here are the boring raps about how great a lover someone is. Brag-style rap.

"We make records like that sometimes," says Run, "but there's different things you can talk about. We make all types of records."

What style suits them best? What do they prefer?

"If the person can just smile," says Run. "A lot of the time the lyrics we write are funny. We just make sure we're very creative and we don't say the same thing over and over. I don't want to make the same message telling people about politics. Sometimes I want to talk about it and sometimes I just make you laugh."

Perhaps it's not surprising that they should prefer the quick one-liners to the put-downs.

Given their lyrics to "Hard Times" or "Wake Up", I would have thought they possessed some political perspective. But it's a no-go area. Like so many successful performers, if they do hold any views, they're not, strictly not, for public consumption.

I ask them about Reagan's re-election. They say they don't care either way. I tell them that surprises me. They shrug their shoulders. The best they can manage is, "Well he lives here but he don't come to any of our shows, so why should we care?"

Yes indeed, and change the subject. Do you think the sound you've created will start to stale with future records?

"You need a different voice than mine," says Run. "We can only make what we like."

Ever thought about going into other areas of music?

"What do you mean?"

Well, ever thought about singing, say?

"We always rap."

Ever tried singing?

"No, I don't want to sing. Maybe I can, but right now we just want to rap."

Embarrassing silence.

"We're going to make a movie," Run finally says. "Did you see *Wildstyle*? That's the one I liked. That was the best."

It was alright. A lot of them are terrible.

"This one will have The Fatboys, Melle Mel, Dr Jeckyll & Mr Hyde and a few others."

I hope it's better than the rest of the rubbish. "Breakdance Boogaloo Joe" or whatever it's called.

"Yeah, I don't like all that. I don't want to make a movie that bad right now, but I'll make it because of all the traffic. A whole lot of records and movies on the street, but I'll just drive up there myself on a one-way street. Mind if I use your phone?"

Be my guest.

WHICH WAY IS next? Run DMC boast about being the best in town, and right now I'm prepared to go along with that. Certainly, they're the most inventive and potentially exciting pair around. The manner in which they deliver their lines – ludicrously over the top – and the challenge of their music make them a riveting proposition.

Whether they can thrive on what they've established is another matter. Their one foray out of rock and rap is a reggae piece to be found on their new LP. Using Yellowman as a toaster, "Roots Rap Reggae" is an undeniably limp exercise in soldering reggae to rap. A sign of the times?

"I can't see Run DMC getting soft," says producer Simmons. "I know they need to develop and not compete. There's always kids that are going to come up with the most direct street stuff, and no artist can stay on top of that. To build a career you have to be more diverse and you have to show what you do best, not what the street wants. The street wants something very specific, and you only have to plug into that scene to know what it is.

"Now Run DMC have done a couple of things to soften up. I didn't want them to go in that direction, so I think we're going to go back to our old format. The next one will be louder and meaner."

For now, the Kings Of Rock may polish their crowns. *Paolo Hewitt* •

ALAMY

"I don't think Keith was pleased"

MICK JAGGER makes a solo album. In Paris, the singer talks dodging paparazzi, the outrageous young Rolling Stones, and the miners' strike. He even touches on his solo prospects. "You can't expect to get No 1s all the time," he says, "and if you do you're a cunt."

— MELODY MAKER FEBRUARY 16 —

JAGGER CUTS THROUGH all the crap…

"When I was in Barbados and Jerry was pregnant, we done a lot of pictures for the press and we didn't wanna be bothered any more and… I could see figures in the garden… y'know, we done the pictures, we played the game. So I walked out very quietly and I found this guy underneath the hedge. He's lying there and I'm going 'Heeyyy' and he goes, 'C'mon, just another few rolls.'

"So I got him in and he has a cup of tea and he says, 'I'm very proud – I was the one who got Princess Di when she was pregnant in the Bahamas, remember that one? Lying on the beach? The Queen called it the blackest day in English journalism.'

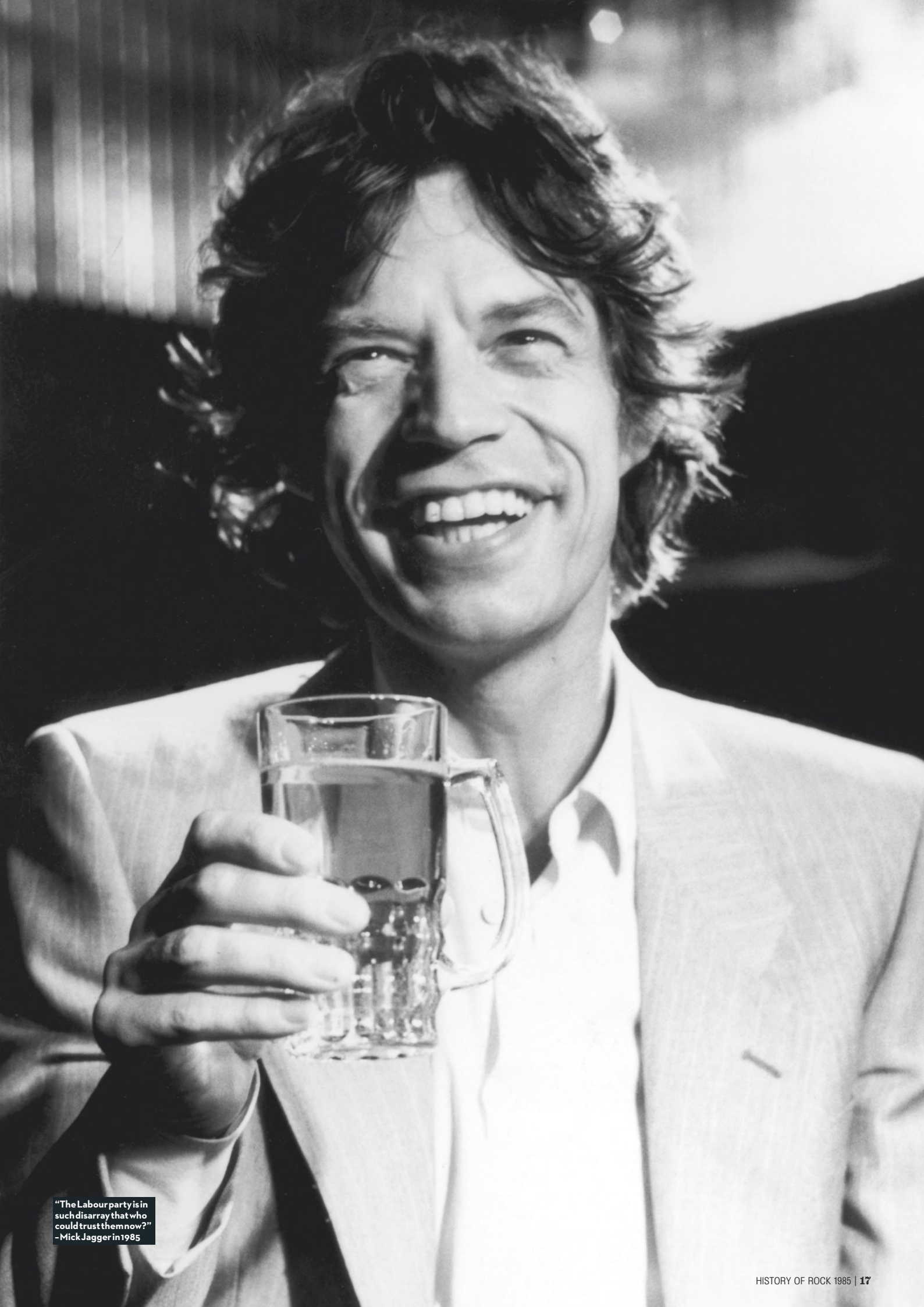
"He really loved it. And he was saying, 'Oh, that was much worse… I had to crawl through all this stuff,' and he was giving me the whole works about how he had to hide all night in this hedge. What a way to earn a pound note! What can you do? If you've not much going on it's alright, but if you have a baby or you've got a new bird or you're getting a divorce, it's always a bit dodgy with that lot. Well, there's always something."

Well, if you've got skeletons in the cupboard, Mick, what do you expect?

"That's right."

Not so much tornado, more a chilling wind… Jagger enters the fray just 15 minutes behind »

DAVE HOGAN / GETTY



"The Labour party is in such disarray that who could trust them now?"
–Mick Jagger in 1985

schedule. A paltry 15 minutes. Before you even notice he's there he's whipped off his jacket, dumped the poncho, shaken every hand in the room and, eyes darting in a dozen different directions at once, absorbed every minute detail of the scene confronting him. Instinctively you know there is no way you could ever win an argument with this man. Without having to say a word, the boy, instantly, is in charge.

He looks like… well, he looks like Jagger.

Disturbingly lean and formidably brusque, he is overtly friendly, but single-mindedly businesslike. He doesn't waste time enquiring after our health or asking if we've had a pleasant flight. "Shall we do the pictures first then?" he asks lightly. It's clearly an order.

The photographer is armed and ready. "I know you've never done this before, Mick, but do you think you can, er…." Instantly Jagger runs obligingly through the whole prolific catalogue of sneers and snarls. Tongue out. Tongue in. Poncho wrapped around his face like a Mexican bandit. Arms aloft. Arms folded. Finger pointing threateningly. Jagger leering. Jagger moody. Jagger posey. Jagger the pro.

Yet still I can't get over how skinny he is. The thought recurs that if my mum was here she'd give him a sharp clip round the ear and drag him home for several hot dinners. My mum's like that. Sadly, she's never been to Paris.

It is, of course, a crazy old day in Paris. The *Whistle Test* team were on the same plane over… David Hepworth was remarkably civil considering how rude we've been about him. *Black Echoes* (yep, *Black Echoes* – "the ace up our sleeve", according to the publicist) were also due in town to talk to the great man later, but sadly John Blake of the *Mirror* had already been and gone.

As for Jagger, he hadn't been up too long. It's early afternoon, but then he was up for most of the night. Not partying – he's not one to party the nights away so much now – but working on the next Stones album. That'll be out… it'll be out sometime… scuppering rumours of an impending split in the ranks. But right now Jagger has allowed himself two days to promote his first ever solo album, *She's The Boss*, with a handful of selected interviews. These he appears to conduct with no obvious relish, but a spirited amiability. The brave, cheery face you might present to the dentist.

As a matter of fact, I happen to like his album. His voice is pleasingly bluesy and the songs generally seem harder than on many a recent Stones album. Jagger smiles gratefully. You're never too rich for minor compliments. Not, however, that this is an opinion likely to be shared by most of my beloved colleagues in the music press. As sure as sure can be, *She's The Boss* will be savaged much as the single "Just Another Night" has already been savaged. Some things are tediously predictable.

Yet oldist or not, there are few rock heart-throbs even today who didn't learn their craft from Mick Jagger… whether they know it or not. And play-acting or not, Jagger remains a rock icon. All that tartiness, that tongue-in-cheek sexuality, the brazen self-parodying flaunting of his own legend, and a persistently natural feel for earthy, dirty rock music… perhaps he might still, even at the decrepit age of 41, be considered the definitive rock star. Perhaps. Perhaps not. But dull he isn't.

"Nah, nah… it's second nature to me," he guffaws in that winning way of his when I ask him if he might be considered an… ahem… embarrassment playing hard rock music at his age.

"See, I don't consider I'd be any good at anything else. I can do other kinds of music, but hard rock is my main talent and I think I can do that pretty good. I don't have any problems doing it."

But you don't think that 20 years ago you would have been appalled to think you'd still be at it when you're over 40?

"Nah. Not appalled. Surprised, perhaps. But all the people I liked when I was 20 were very much in the forties age bracket. Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf. I thought that Elvis was ancient and he was only something like eight years older than me. But he was still good. Even though I thought he was old, I still liked what he did when I was 12 or 13 or somethin'."

Do you really think you've still got something to say to a young audience?

"Oh yeah. Yeah. The thing about starting out in a band is that the first albums you do tend to be horrible. Most first albums by bands, the only thing they have going for them is enthusiasm.

"The first Stones album is a pretty good album really, considering when it was recorded – it has a lot of brashness and enthusiasm – but quite often that's all those albums have. You can really play 'em after a while because they just get boring, there's not any musicianship going on, there's nothing underneath it – it's just speed and enthusiasm."

The obvious question is, after a 20-year career, why has Mick Jagger now decided to put out a solo album?

"The obvious answer is why not?"

Obvious but glib.

"I could say it in three or four languages if you like."

Go on then.

"No, the thing is a lot of my mates and people like you were always saying, 'C'mon, Mick, why are you lazing about?' Basically, it wasn't a thought-out thing at all, so glib answers abound, but the truth is I worked a lot in 1983 with the Stones in the studio. We done a lot of videos and I wrote these songs very quickly, like in a couple of weeks. As I'd been doing all this work with the Stones, there was no way I was going back in the studio again after being there for nine months or whatever, including doing a video, so I thought I'd do demos for fun. Then I thought, 'Wait a minute, I might as well do this solo album everyone's always asking me about and I've always said, "Oh I might do it one day."'

"It was a good time to do it because I thought it was time to start breaking patterns a little bit. I hadn't been taking enough chances maybe… it was doing an album and then going on the road for a little while, then laying back. I thought the time was good to get on and do something. And the record company were very good about it. They said, 'We don't want you to do four albums with the Stones; we want you to do two on your own.' So when I said I wanted to do this solo album they were very supportive rather than saying, 'Oh well, we'd rather have a Stones album first if you don't mind.'"

> "Hard rock is my main talent… I think I can do that pretty good"

"It's a joke on sexism": Jagger on the title track to *She's The Boss*

REX FEATURES

Co-produced by Bill Laswell, the album features a grand old array of name session musicians from Jeff Beck to Nile Rodgers and Sly and Robbie. Yet the most surprising thing about it is how little it strays from the basic rock format honed to perfection by the Stones down the years. Freed from the guidance of Sir Keef and the others, Jagger was widely expected to go off at a tangent.

"Well, in a band you expect to come up with ideas, that's what a band's all about, whereas when you're working with musicians in this way they basically expect it all to come from you. All the direction, the lines of the bass – everything.

"I guess there are some things on there I wouldn't have done with the Rolling Stones in the same way, but with the material I didn't set out to do an experimental album like some hip-hop thing or a jazz album, which is what a lot of people thought I was doing.

"So the songs I wrote were basically the same sort of songs I write for the Stones, the same kind of material. Whether

"He said why not do it later?": Mick and Keith in November 1985, nine months after the release of the former's first solo album

they would have been done differently with the Stones is hypothetical."

If nothing else, it has a provocative title. The song "She's The Boss" is a pretty standard growly R'n'B affair which, to me at least, sounds like a backhander aimed at the more militant elements of the feminist movement. Jagger denies this quite strenuously.

"Nah, I just made it up on the spur of the moment in the studio. Most of the vocal is live. I dunno, it's about all the executive lady talk. You get a lot of all that about the real independent woman, so I just made it up. I made the words as a spoof on the whole thing."

So it's not a reverse sexism thing?

"Nah, it's not. But you can take it any way you want. There is some serious stuff in there. The guy is screaming that he can't fuck her 'cos he's got to wash his hair… it's a joke, y'know. It's a joke on sexism. All the women I've played it to really like it. All the female executives at the record company really liked that one."

You'll get flak for it, though.

"Don't think so. Not from any of the women who've heard it so far anyway. Maybe I'll get it from men. Feminist men. Butch men. Macho men won't like it."

The oddity on the album is a ballad called "Hard To Please", which Jagger performs in a weird strangulated drawl. I tell him he sounds like Dylan grappling with "Lay Lady Lay". For the one and only time during our encounter he looks genuinely shocked.

"It's supposed to sound like Aaron Neville," he grumbles with exaggerated shirtiness. "That's what I was aiming at. Someone told me yesterday it sounded as if I was trying to copy Marvin Gaye. I wasn't trying to copy anybody really, but there's a little bit of everything in it."

Not everybody, it seems, is as thrilled about the idea of a Jagger solo album. If rumours are to be believed – and I always believe rumours – the other Stones were less than enamoured of the whole escapade and Sir Keef, in particular, was miffed that the project was occupying so much time when he wanted to get on with the next Stones album.

"Yeah…" he concedes vaguely, "but Keith knew I was gonna do this. He knew I'd planned it, 'cos when we talked about the Stones contracts I said they wanted me to do two solo albums and I said, 'I think it's a good idea. I want to do it, otherwise I'm never gonna do it.' I told him I wanted to do it now, and he said why not do it later? And I just said, 'Well, no… I really feel like doing it now. I don't think he was that pleased about it, but he got used to the idea. Anyway, I was the only one in the band who hadn't done a solo project. Keith had done tours on his own and Ronnie had… Keith had even put out a single on his own…"

He pauses to savour the anticipated raised eyebrows… "It's called 'Run Rudolph Run'."

A further dramatic pause to accommodate the inevitable sniggers. "And Bill's done several solo album, Ronnie's done loads, innumerable things which I've helped him with, produced, wrote songs for, everything. I was the only one who hadn't done anything, so I don't think they had any kind of complaints whatsoever. Really. They were stymied."

The managing director has spoken.

IT SEEMS HARD to credit it now, children, but there was a time when society was repulsed by MP Jagger. The immorality of youth, violence on the streets, drug abuse, the breakdown of law and order, heavy snowfall in March, losing to the West Indies at cricket, most of the ills of the western world were at one time or another laid directly at the door of the Rolling Stones. And when they said Stones they meant Jagger.

A recent biography of the Stones by Philip Norman suggests that his current respectability, his elite status in the establishment, was always something that Jagger craved. Mick was, the book implies, impressed from the start by fame, wealth and international status, and whatever the fearsome public image or outrageous headline foisted upon them, he consistently saw the Stones as a tool to achieve it for himself. A simplistic view, but like Brian Jones and unlike Sir Keef, Mick enjoyed a relatively comfortable upbringing. It was the music of Howlin' Wolf that moved him, not the desire to completely overturn traditional values.

Now, with a teenage daughter of his own – and he believes in a strictly disciplined upbringing by all accounts – and the benefit of having experienced virtually every excess known to mankind, Jagger can afford to be philosophical about it all. He insists that the Stones always were the real thing, and while the wild rock'n'roll rebel image was something fostered by the media, it was never consciously manufactured. »

RICHARD YOUNG / REX FEATURES

"It wasn't just a pose in the first place. In that period, we *were* very angry and violent. But a lot of that soon disappeared when we achieved success; by 1965, even though people still believed that if you had long hair you were rebellious… and that was it.

"It's hard to put yourself back. It's hard to explain to people who didn't live through that period what it was like. It was unbelievable. But by '65 the Stones were part of show business in a way. A successful band, internationally known. And if it hadn't been for all the drug busts… that changed an awful lot… it changed our attitude to everything."

In what way?

"Well, it brought us back to the… we were just a good-time band having a very good time on the road making the music we wanted and making records that I think were pretty good. Then we got into this whole thing of being busted and went to jail and everything, and that put us back to where we started, so we had to spend all our energy and time fighting that rather than making music, which was really boring. Boring and time-consuming. It made us regress in little ways in attitude."

> "That time from mid-'64 to '67 was a very happy period in our lives"

And that reinforced the rebel thing.

"Yeah, but what I'm trying to say is there was a period between that when we were really happy-go-lucky and enjoying life and having a lot of success and not being excessive in any way and working very hard producing a lot of albums very quickly. On the road permanently and going all round the world and having a lot of fun. That time from the middle of '64 to '67 was a very happy period in our lives."

Have you found it hard to hang on to your sanity?

"No, not really. Only one or two times it got a bit difficult. When you're a kid you think everyone's against you. That was enough. And then Brian really bought it over that whole thing. He took it all to heart and bought it, more or less. He let it fester in him. So that was a tough time. But after that we began to get back into it."

Jagger has gone on record as saying that he rates the first Stones album the best. Which support the widely held view that the Stones went soft centuries ago. It certainly sounds as if, musically at least, he's nostalgic for the early days.

"Well, everyone likes to think about when they were young, but I'm not really a nostalgia person, I'm more interested in what's going on now than what happened whenever. Of course, you look back at the past sometimes with a bit of a glow, but it wasn't very easy a lot of times, it was pretty awful really. Well, you must have lived though that. It was very different then. You couldn't do just what you wanted. You couldn't wear what you wanted without people laughing at you.

"Now you can, more or less… in England anyway. A few people laugh at you, but everyone laughed at you then. It was constant, so you got very hardened to that abuse. It wasn't particularly funny, but being in a band helped because you could support each other."

Jagger's present role in the current scheme of things is, in any case, confused. While the Stones remain more imitated than any other band, anybody whose sexual adventures inspires such interest in the society columns is rightly ripe for derision. Jagger contests that he despises this close media attention, but admits that he'll "play the game" when it suits him.

Despite his riches, he hates the thought that people might think of him as a Tory and claims to be concerned about social issues. Contrary to his reputation as a bread head, he claims (though not in this interview) to give away a lot of his money to charity – and he feels it is his duty to do so.

Genuinely interested, I ask him for his views on the miners' strike. It provokes the most eloquent and lengthy dissertation of our meeting. As he becomes more animated, the Americanisms that creep in during the course of conversation swiftly disappear, as do the snatches of yob talk – his trademark – which hover like a perverse defiance in the face of his huge wealth.

"There is no right or wrong in something like the miners' strike. It's the malaise that's affected England since the turn of the century, the ever-continuing malaise of British industry. And it's a sickness that England doesn't realise or doesn't want to realise, and certain other people exploit that unwillingness to change fast enough.

"To change from heavy industry, the over-emphasis of heavy industry, most of it in the North and the Midlands, right, and Scotland… in shipbuilding, steel, coal, all these things that made England like a great… well, the *first* industrial country in the 18th and 19th century.

"It's a gradual rundown of those industries and the slowness in transferring to other technology… and unfortunately the miners' strike is one of the products of that continuing inadaptability, and the people that don't want to adapt. And the people who want to exploit other people's unwillingness to do so. Of course, it's tragic if you're living in one of those places, which I never did.

The Rolling Stones in 1985: (l–r) Ronnie Wood, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

Jagger with Texan model Jerry Hall, his partner since separation from Bianca in 1977

"I was brought up in a town which was commuter and industrial, and we had some heavy industry in the town. We had Fords, which is really close and a lot of people worked there; and we had J&E Halls, which is like heavy industrial equipment; and we had Burroughs Wellcome, which is chemicals; and we had all the chalk and the quarry, which is heavy. And we had coalfields not far away. So if there was a lull at J&E Halls and they laid off people at Vickers in Woolwich in the armaments – and there obviously was a lay-off after the war – people could move to a light industry like Burroughs Wellcome, which was a drug industry and taking on people.

"But if you're living in a one-industry town it must be very, very difficult. It's much easier for somebody like me coming from that background, knowing that with the unemployment thing it's relatively easy to switch from one to another. You didn't have to move. You just took the bus to another factory. But if you're living in a mining community in Wales – and I've been to those – those places are just dead. The mines are dead. So it's a whole different ball game and people in the south of England probably don't realise that.

"But that diversification of industry and mobility of labour is the way the UK, like everyone else, is gonna have to go. The same thing's happening in America in the north-east. Slowly. There's too much steel production and all those things, so people have to move. They did move a lot to the south-west, and they're starting to come back now because the north-east is becoming the big place for light industry. Is this a music interview?"

Go on.

"The children of the people who migrated got bored because there wasn't enough happening, so they come back to that big area from Boston to Washington. They come back to Massachusetts and those factories for computers and all that stuff being operated there. The secret, a lot of it, is mobility and also adaptability.

"It's unfortunate in England that some mines and other industries have to be changed, but otherwise the whole thing's gonna have to go down. The whole thing about England being an industrial base and a rich country is gonna go down the tubes. But I don't think it's gonna happen, because I don't think English people are that stupid in the end.

"The other thing that's so bad about it is it makes the Labour Party so ineffective as an opposition party. Even if I were a Tory – which I'm really not – I wouldn't like the idea of the Labour party being so weak and divided because it doesn't give the Thatcher government any kind of proper opposition. The Labour party is in such disarray that who could trust them now? Well, not trust, but who could rely on them to run a singular policy, which the UK needs, because they are so divided. And the miners' strike has divided them even more, so they're gonna need another period of a few years to get back together."

So you think the miners' strike has been misguided?

"No. It's not misguided, it's guided. Some of the individuals might be misguided, but it's a very political thing. It's a guided political motivation, as was the miners' strike in… was it '29? And the '74 one was a guided one too. Due to the success of the '74 one, I thought there was a strong possibility that this strike would bring down the government, but obviously, that's not gonna happen.

"So… and I don't think Arthur Scargill will be too annoyed with me for saying it – what they couldn't do with the ballot box, the miners' union were trying to do by striking… bring down the Tory government. But they didn't succeed and I think they should really go back to bring the Labour party back to a cohesive political unit and try to do it the other way. I don't think it's done anybody any good, the miners' strike. OK, so the miners are gonna have a slightly better package than otherwise they might have done, but it must have caused so much hardship to individuals. And all the thing about it being such a strong union – it's weakened their union."

Phew! This is a man, remember, who was friendly with Labour MP Tom Driberg and once toyed with the idea of standing for parliament.

WE TALK A little more about music. Jagger has little time these days for most of the chart bands he hears and is rudely dismissive of the likes of Wham! and Duran. He admits he'd get a special thrill if his solo stuff does well, but isn't expecting miracles.

"You shouldn't really worry about all that, especially if you've had a lot of success, because you've got to have ups and downs in your career. You can't expect to get No 1s all the time, and if you do you're a cunt.

"Look at Culture Club; that was the biggest thing since sliced bread. Then they put out a record that basically wasn't as good, and kids didn't go out and buy it. The album was pretty horrible, actually… and it stiffed. But that should just make you more determined when you go in and do the next one. Your life can't be run by totally commercial precepts."

His main interest – as it has always been – is black music, and he spent much of last summer dancing the nights away in London in obscure reggae clubs. "I like to dance," he says simply. "If you can't dance to it, then to me a lot of it is useless."

So you still go out?

"Yeah, I've always been able to go out. It's important not to be stupid about it and be as ordinary as possible in so far as you lead a pretty ordinary life and never say no, I can't do that. A lot of Americans cut themselves off. But English people by and large – all the ones I know, anyway – they go out and put up with it. Sometimes you get a bit of argy-bargy, people come up and say ''Ello Mick' or 'Fuck off, Mick', but you put up with it because you want to be there, whether it's in a pub or a concert or whatever. It can be boring, though… you get to learn all the little ins and outs of how to avoid people bugging you."

Lennon's death must have hit you hard.

"Yeah… it was a horrible thing to happen, but you're not gonna change your life because of that. A few people might have done that, but… there's always the sub-machine gun in the pocket. I think it was an isolated incident really; it wasn't like a spate of people getting killed. It's not something you want to talk about really, because it gives people ideas. You say 'No way' and then you get some fucking idiot coming at you."

Mick, what are the high points of your career?

Not a moment's hesitation.

"The Mod Ball at Wembley, 1964… *Ready Steady Go!*… I loved doing *Ready Steady Go!*. The thing I remember was watching Otis Redding. He did 20 minutes at the end of *Ready Steady Go!*, live TV. It was great. Much better than *The Tube*. There's a tape of it. It was lost for a while, but they dug it up. That was excellent. I remember that. And playing in Richmond when it first started to really happen, that was a great buzz. Los Angeles in '81, that was great…"

By this time, the natives are getting well itchy. The first bell rang 20 minutes ago, and makeup ladies are now being ushered into The Presence to prepare him for his audience with David Hepworth. The photographer and I are shepherded out.

Jagger whacks us powerfully across the shoulders. "Well, boys, that was really wonderful," he says, sarcasm-a-go-go.

Quite. *Colin Irwin* •

ROBIN PLATZER / GETTY

Hüsker Dü stir up a Midwestern dust storm: (l–r) Grant Hart, Greg Norton and Bob Mould

ALBUMS REVIEW 1985

ALBUMS

Hüsker Dü New Day Rising SST

These are fast times that we live in, something that dawned upon Hüsker Dü long before *New Day Rising* glimpsed the light.

They keep a breathless, occasionally frantic pace with all the strains involved. Although they shatter barriers of sound, they never seem to break the boundaries of their native land. Hüsker Dü, like Sonic Youth in their way or (for all their petulant protestations) Swans in theirs, are unavoidably American – the dust of their Midwest *heimat* is lodged deep within the creases between every chord.

It's ironic, in these days of gun-toting, culture-popping, born-again, damn-de-diddle Yankeeism, that the imagery of the Midwest through to New Mexico should have such appeal. Even those more stateless than I seem somehow drawn to the sandy wastes and cramped psyches that (in our minds at least) have altered little since the age of Faulkner – "Tupelo", from the forthcoming Nick Cave LP, shows our favourite exile burying deeper still into smalltown Americana. But where Cave is always Malcolm Lowry's man apart, Hüsker Dü, like Sam Shepard's truck-saddle-sore wanderers, are more at home around here. Their journey, for all its personal detail, is more outward going.

Hüsker Dü are three, but it's the huge guitar of the large Bob Mould that swells to fill their widescreen soundscape. The sound of his six strings has the same evocative qualities as Ry Cooder's – where the sound of Cooder is the sound of the scorched New Mexico desert, or the Louisiana swamp, Mould's is the dust-grain swirl of the wide-open spaces, where words are scattered like roadside cafes, domestic traumas bursting inside while the litter whirls around the gas pumps outside.

Mould himself is one of the great blue-collar endomorphs. As pictured in *NME*'s hardcore issue, collared T-shirt straining against a blubbery figure, grin bubbling through a broad face, the bottleneck peeping from the brown paper bag in hand, he looks like he could have a heart to match his waistband, probably paired with a clout to clot your brain cells. Prod him and he'd wobble, but push him and...

Mould, it should be clear by now, is no slight man, bolstering his ego with a barrage of guitar. His sound, however large, feels like an extension of himself. It's grand but never grandiose. His singing, even more so on *New Day Rising* than on it's predecessor *Zen Arcade*, sometimes has the wrenched defiance of the cornered, sometimes the strange fragility of 16 tons of sensitivity.

So, 59 times the pain, 100 times the feeling, 1,000 times the space. This is the big country – for real. *Don Watson, NME March 9*

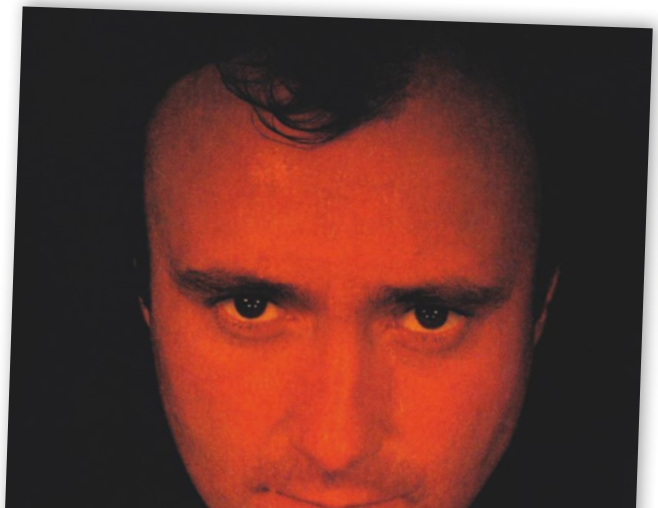
Phil Collins No Jacket Required VIRGIN

The rise and rise of wee Phil Collins has to be one of the stranger tales in the wacky worlds of pop. Starting off as a boy actor, a sort of very English Micky Dolenz, the adolescent Phil somehow drifted away from such a perfectly acceptable career into the much more sinister surroundings of the demon pomp-rock. Yes, dry ice and 15-minute album tracks were the staple diet of a band called Genesis for whom the now much older but perennially wee Mr Collins bashed the skins.

Then, disaster. The charismatic frontman departed the fold and Genesis were suddenly a band without face or voicebox. But, miracle of miracles, that little drummer boy had been sitting on a big, big voice all this time and he now rushed to the rescue, saving the day for millions of art students while simultaneously paving the way for the solo career.

And now the man who brought the tank top back into pop has released what many folk might refer to as his long-awaited third solo album. Not surprisingly, *No Jacket Required* contains absolutely no surprises. It is, quite simply, Phil Collins Superstar doing what Phil Collins does best, singing and drumming on 10 of his own songs, most of which are about the sadder side of all things Valentine, with titles like "One More Night", "Doesn't Anybody Stay Together Anymore" and "Take Me Home".

Naturally enough, it is all far too smooth, manufactured and bland to elicit any real involvement or response on the part of the listener, a sort of desperately timid, albeit reasonably pleasant



GREG HELGESON

backdrop to all our less serious bedroom tiffs.

"Sussudio" you all know already, of course, only most of you probably refer to it under its original title "1999" sung by that incredibly rude Prince chap.

"Take Me Home", which wraps the whole thing up, will soon become equally familiar when it's inevitably released in single form to cash in on the fact that vocals are ably assisted by Sting, Helen Terry and Peter Gabriel. Which is, of course, somewhere near where we first came in.

Sadly, none of this increasingly fashionable backslapping can do much to alter the initial impression, that Phil Collins is a generally sound sort of bloke who makes fairly ordinary records for very ordinary people to play at their desperately ordinary parties. Like the man says, no jacket required. And not too much imagination either.

Barry McIlheney, MM Feb 23

Tears For Fears Songs From The Big Chair MERCURY

None of you should really be too surprised that Tears For Fears have made such an excellent album. The healthy signs were there as far back as "Mothers Talk". A song that paved the way for "Shout", surely one of the BIGGEST noises this side of Frankie.

Both songs are included on *Songs From The Big Chair*, an album that fully justifies the rather sneering, told-you-so looks adopted by Curt Smith and Roland Orzabal on the sleeve. "The Working Hour" is almost as fast as "Shout", starting off with a sweet little saxophone solo before bursting out into a big, wide arrangement full of the sound of chiming guitars and drums that always manage to stumble their way through to the heart of the matter.

"Everybody Wants To Rule The World" actually SWINGS, and provides further evidence that the single greatest improvement in Tears For Fears is to be found in the vocals, moving away from the tortured squawks of the "Mad World" era through to a far more restrained form of delivery. Indeed, the school of thought that TFF are fast becoming the Simon & Garfunkel of the '80s is further bolstered by "I Believe", which bears absolutely no resemblance to the classic Bachelors hit of the same name.

Instead it's dedicated to Robert Wyatt, probably the only person in the world who will be able to work out exactly what the very plaintive vocal of young Roland is trying to say. Whatever, it's the sort of fragile ballad that Art Garfunkel used to pipe out note-perfect to half a million drugged American students, and as such should guarantee mega-success Stateside for Blighty's latest and hottest contenders.

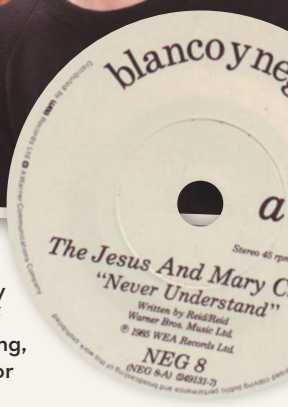
Without wishing to ruin a positive review by introducing a note of bitchiness, Orzabal is very close to becoming a bit of a George to Curt's Andrew, taking the credit on all 10 songs from his big chair while poor Smithy gets a look-in on just the one. Elsewhere, Orzabal teams up mainly with previously anonymous keyboards player Ian Stanley, the man responsible for half of both "Shout" and "Mothers Talk", and as such an obviously vital figure in this group's stunning transformation from last year's bad joke to this year's biggest surprise.

The final track is called "Listen", another smoochy sort of ballad which features Marilyn David on operatic vocal and which has a title that could well be used as a one-word summary for what you all should do when confronted with a copy of *Songs From The Big Chair*.

An awful lot of people will, of course, go on and on about overcoats, The Lotus Eaters and an alleged lack of depth. And an awful lot of people will have to eat an awful lot of words.

Barry McIlheney, MM Mar 3

Good old-fashioned bad boys: Jim (left) and William Reid of The Jesus And Mary Chain



SINGLES REVIEW 1985

SINGLES

The Jesus And Mary Chain Never Understood BLANCO Y NEGRO

Good old-fashioned racket from pop's latest good old-fashioned bad boys. Somewhere along the vintage Killing Joke/Stooges/Pistols metal-as-stream-of-consciousness axis, "Never Understand" starts at A with Z in its sights and simply doesn't let up. Not unpleasant, of its kind. Skilfully amateurish production by uncredited backroom wizard. B-side comprises the threatening "Suck" and the chaotic "Ambition", which produces an effect similar to having a Black & Decker sander thrust into your face. Spiral scratch revisited. By the way, which one's Jesus? *MM Feb 23*

Don Henley The Boys Of Summer GEFFEN
Glenn Frey The Heat Is On MCA

How's about a bit of Don Henley? Didn't think so. Actually, the old Eagle scores several points over Jagger by not being ashamed about his age. "The Boys Of Summer" is a likeably unpretentious AOR single – something about as common as black faces on the *MM* front page – that shows how to grow old with grace. Better than just about everything the Eagles put out and should be a hit. I know we're not supposed to like records by people like Henley, but given the choice between the callow efforts of would-be West Coasters like Lloyd Cole and an artfully melancholy example of the real thing, I'll plump for the latter.

Don's former colleague Glenn Frey's "The Heat Is On", meanwhile, is evidence that it's never wise to trust more than one old hippy at a time. Taken from Eddie Murphy's new starring vehicle, it has absolutely nothing to do with the great Isley Brothers track of the same name and should be prosecuted for something or other. *MM Feb 9*

Prince & The Revolution Let's Go Crazy/ Take Me With U WEA

Double-header snipped from the exotic *Purple Rain* elpee, and no doubt this will find the heavily guarded celebrity speeding once more towards the top of the charts. "Let's Go Crazy" will have all those Hendrix comparisons making a comeback, being a frenetic portion of rock 'n' soul covered in caterwauling lead guitar. "Take Me With U" is more relaxed, with a quirky string arrangement papering over the absence of any great substance. *MM Feb 23*

Madonna Material Girl SIRE

Bouncy stuff from the world's least virginal female singer. "*I am a material girl*," confesses Madonna, who is glimpsed on the sleeve clutching a blue satin sheet about her naked personage. *Rrrrrrr*. The music is catchy enough, with a purposeful throb in its step. But what is the strange ringing noise that comes jabbing out of the mix? Hit, of course. *MM Feb 23*

The Damned Grimly Fiendish MCA

From the '60s came jaunty keyboard-led ditties, and in their wake Madness. Now, third-hand, come the eternal Damned – truly a long way from the spirit of "New Rose". *MM Mar 30*

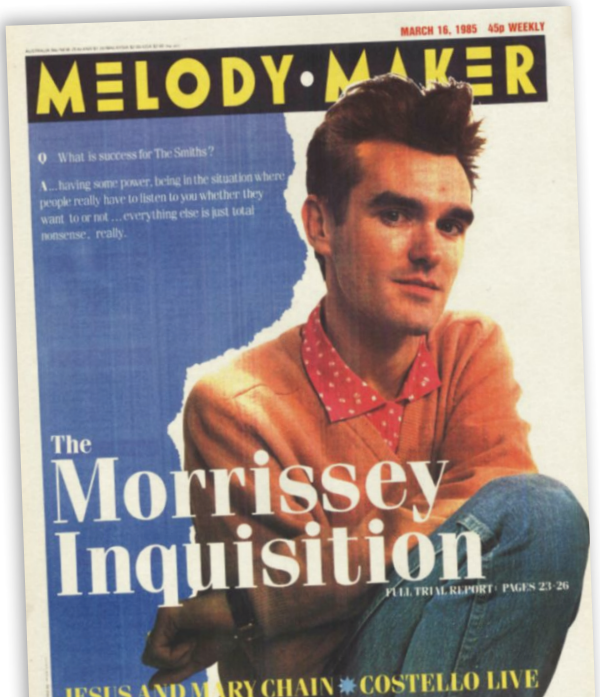
MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY

"I'm prepared to go down with the ship"

On behalf of THE SMITHS, Morrissey meets the fanzine press. He faces questions about love, Band Aid, the Moors Murderers and the band's own unique position in the world. "There are people I admire," he says, "but ultimately we are alone."

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 16 —

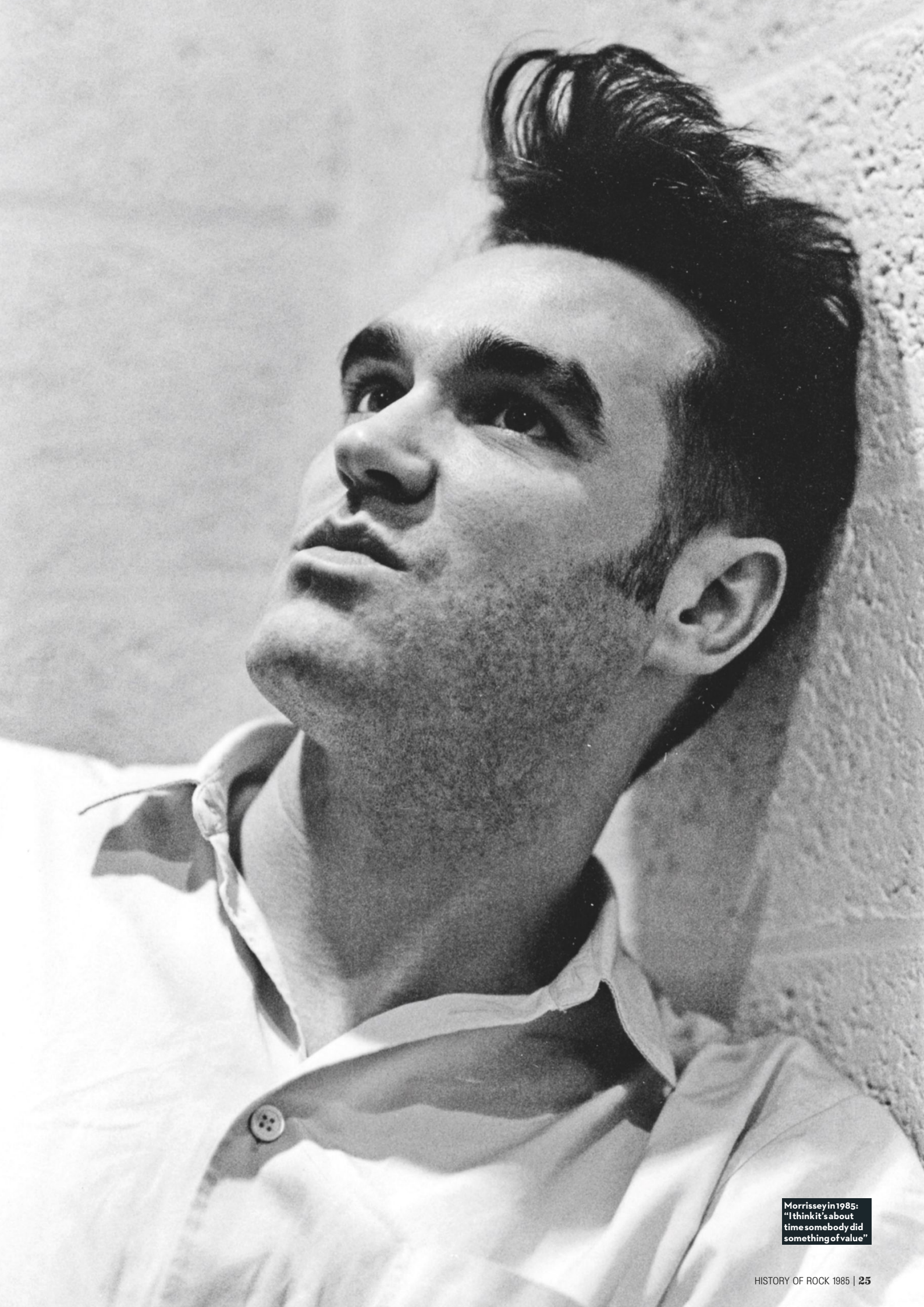
THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW was conducted by a panel of fanzine writers including Dave Haslam from *Debris*, Tim Barlow from *Eat Yourself Fitter*, Rob Deacon from *Abstract*, Lesley O'Toole from *Inside Out*, Jon Story from *Bucketfull Of Brains*, and Robert Watts from *Running Order*. With *Melody Maker* editor Allan Jones as acting chairman, the panel met at Rough Trade's London offices on Thursday, February 14, 1985. What happened next is what happens next…



ROB VERHORST / ALAMY

***RUNNING ORDER*: Why have you decided to do this with fanzine writers?**

MORRISSEY: We had lots of requests and it seemed really snotty to ignore them. It seems like lots of people felt that as soon as we began to chart and became big business, we would forget all our original ideals. And I get so many letters from people who are hysterical and frustrated and it seems that The Smiths are under so much pressure. The implications seems to be, "When will The Smiths fall down? When will they forget everybody? When will they turn into some rigid, surfy pop group?" Which will never happen. And I get really tired of people suggesting it will… It seems that every single day I have to go before the courts and explain so many things. I think The Smiths are under a great deal of pressure. More pressure than any other group. »



Morrissey in 1985: "I think it's about time somebody did something of value"

***INSIDE OUT*: Why?**
I think probably because so many people had so much faith in us and because we live in such a bleak world, people really believed that that faith couldn't really have been authentic and eventually the cloak would fall and The Smiths would turn into… well, something else…

***IO*: What is the greatest pressure on you?**
There are so many. Where does one begin? Well… The Smiths seem to have a lot of critics and the greatest pressure I think is just fending them off. A lot of people don't give you the right to reply about many things and they come to assumptions. But this is just modern journalism.

***IO*: What about the pressure of being a hero to so many people?**
I can take it, I can take it.

***IO*: I mean, you get all these letters from people saying, "If you don't write back I'm going to commit suicide…"**
Yes, it's difficult. We can snigger about it, but it's very difficult because it happens every day and what does one do? If you reply to these letters you become immediately involved and you become absolutely responsible, which is a terrible thing. It's sad to me that so many people do think about suicide and so many people's lives are in a shambolic mess, but here we are…

***DEBRIS*: Why is it, do you think, that so many of your songs seem to deal with the adolescent experience, even the work on the new LP? I mean, you are getting older.**
I am, indeed. But why… I think if most people sang or wrote words, that's what they'd sing about or write about. I'm not obsessed with it. It was something, as probably lots of people can gather, I didn't cope with too cleverly. So I do feel bitterness, but I'm not massively, incurably obsessed with it.

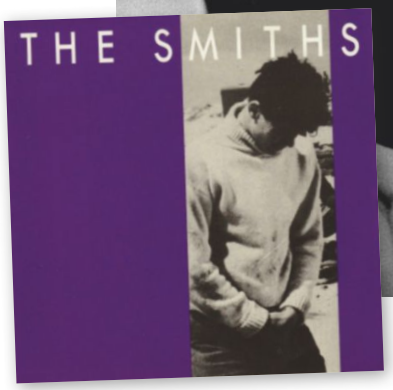
***DEBRIS*: Do you think you've made a myth out of the idea that adolescence is something special?**
Well, I think it is special. It forms your opinions for the rest of your life. The very obvious things about adolescence really do shape your future. If you have a wonderful adolescence, you go on to be a very assured person. But if you don't, you don't really have assurance. It's the stage I think you have to go through successfully and very ambitiously, otherwise you're in some trouble. That's my observation. I think we shouldn't really underestimate it.

***EAT YOURSELF FITTER*: Do you think now that you are successful you've merely traded one form of misery for another?**
No, I don't think so. Virtually everything about the pop industry, I detest. I don't feel a part of it to any degree. But that's fine, because now we're becoming successful, and I think it's very interesting that The Smiths can survive, nonetheless, even though we all feel this way. So that's quite unique. But I don't feel absolutely, entirely miserable. I would do if I couldn't do this.

***IO*: What is success for The Smiths?**
It's just really the very obvious things like selling records and having some power, being in the situation where people really have to listen to you whether they want to or not. That's success and that's valuable. Everything else is just total nonsense, really.

***DEBRIS*: Did you all sit down and say to each other, "What do we do to make the second LP avoid the pitfalls of the first?"**
Yes, we did, and there was only one answer to that and that was to produce it ourselves and have control to the last detail, which didn't necessarily happen with the first LP… But, yeah, the whole idea with *Meat Is Murder* was to control it totally, and without a producer things were better. We saw things clearer.

***DEBRIS*: What about musical aims – it seems a bit harder.**
Yes, it does. And in a way that's intentional, because now that we have quite a big audience it's really important to me that people realise that we haven't become sloppy and we haven't become cushioned and we haven't become fat and lazy. Because we didn't want to go into the big league, as it were, and adhere to all the rules. That's pointless. It makes the entire history of The Smiths totally pointless. There has to be something that separates us. And to be quite honest, we are very angry. I mean, in very simple terms we are very, very angry. We're angry about the music industry. We're very angry about pop music. And I think it's about time that somebody said something and somebody did something that is of value. Which is always very difficult, because when you try to say something with value and intelligence, you have to stand trial, you have to go before the jury, as it were, and explain yourself. People who are idiots and idiotic and bland and pointless and stupid and poppy – they can do what they like and nobody pins them against a wall and says, "Why are you doing that?" But if you try and do something with a grain of intellect, you have to answer for it every single day of your life. Which to me is the most irksome part of the music industry. In a way, it means you are being taken seriously, but then as I recollect, it was always the very, very dull people in music who were ever taken seriously. So there's really a lot to do. It's not easy.



***MELODY MAKER*: What specific targets do you have for your anger?**
Journalists, mainly. Well… here we are in critical times, Allan, very critical times. But would we know it if we looked at popular music and what's being churned out by the old sausage machine? Would we know that we're in critical times? I mean, if some strange creature landed from another planet and checked out the hit parade, as it were, he or she would just presume that we're living in a life of absolute discofied jubilance – which, of course, is true in your case. There has to be a grain of realism.

***MM*: So you're saying that not enough music reflects the times in which we live?**
Some music does, but sadly it's all in the independent chart, which, of course, is of no use to the masses because nobody hears the independent chart. It's of no practical value, whatsoever. There's no point being incredibly enlightened and incredibly aware if nobody can actually hear you. You do have to break through. And I think The Smiths are the first group in musical history to do that.

> "Without a producer, things were better. We saw things clearer"

***DEBRIS*: How do you feel about your treatment by the national papers over the last year?**
It's been wonderful and it's been atrocious. It's really impossible for me to have a very clear view of it, so I don't really know. A lot of it has made me really distressed, but it's really only made me distressed because I care so much,

"It seemed really snotty to ignore them": *Melody Maker* editor Allan Jones chairs a meeting between Morrissey and six fanzine scribes who had requested an interview

which is quite wrong. But I do care a great deal and I do get very distressed about vulgar comments. But it's worth it for the times when people actually really understand what you're doing.

***MM*: What about the general thesis that people, in times of crisis, actually want entertainment?**
Well, I don't really know what entertainment is. I mean, when we say the word "entertainment", we think of Leslie Crowther – who's never entertained me – we think of *The Price Is Right*. The word entertainment doesn't really belong to any scientific language, does it? I don't think so. I mean, the things that entertained me in the past always horrified everybody else. So what does the question mean?

***DEBRIS*: This is going to be very pretentious…**
You always are, Dave.

***DEBRIS*: …but don't you think one of the things about our "critical times" is that there is a gap between what is considered art and what is considered entertainment? In a way, a lot of things are shovelled off into so-called art and ignored, or shovelled off into entertainment and ignored, and as you say, there's nothing really that is considered to bridge the two…**
No… because I don't think most people believe that they can be bridged. Most people think that popular music is the lowest possible art form, and anything that happens in popular music really isn't important. If a character like Pete Burns existed within classical music it would be a world revelation, but because he doesn't, he's just there and he's very silly and he's very funny and he's very entertaining, and ultimately he doesn't mean anything.

***RUNNING ORDER*: Did you ever get to meet him?**
Yes. I think he's a wonderful person. He's one of the few people I can feel a great affinity with. Namely, because he says exactly what he wants to. Which, of course, is a national sin within music, especially considering the things he wants to say.

***EYF*: It's been fairly trendy to sort of scorn and mock Morrissey because you dwell on the unhappy side of life, but has this strengthened your resolve to provide an antidote to, like, Wham!?**
It's fuel. It's really fuel for the old anger. I'm glad about it.

***EYF*: Is that what that track "That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore" is about?**
Yes, it is. When I wrote the words for that, I was just so completely tired of all the same old journalistic questions and people trying, you know, this contest of wit, trying to drag me down and prove that I was a complete fake. And I was tired of that because it just seemed that, like, even the people within popular music, even the people within the music industry, didn't have that much faith in it as an art form. And they wanted to really get rid of all these people who are trying to make some sense out of the whole thing. And I found that really distressing.

***IO*: Do you see yourself as a humorous writer at all?**
Yes, I do. Nobody else does, I don't know why. And it's distressing, because I often feel that if people don't consider me to be remotely humorous, who on earth do they consider to be humorous? So I do feel that I need some recognition in that area. But then again, knowing my luck, people will probably start comparing me to… um… It's so difficult to name names these days… you meet people at *Top Of The Pops* and »

Meat Is Murder-era Smiths: (l–r) Johnny Marr, Morrissey, Mike Joyce and Andy Rourke

they're incredibly civilised and it spoils everything, because you really want to get in some horrific criticism.

***MM*: Do you think that too much civility simply leads to hypocrisy, because people aren't being totally honest about how they feel about each other?**
I don't know if that's civility. You can meet people and they're terribly polite to you, but it's not really civility, I don't think. I think it's something else. I think it's just a matter of being two-faced. But no… I'm all in favour of civility. I think we need a lot of civility. Buckets full of it.

> "As long as humans are so violent towards animals, there will be war"

***EYF*: Do you think old-fashioned virtues like courtesy have gone by the board?**
I don't think that courtesy is really old-fashioned.

***EYF*: People would consider it as such.**
Well, they shouldn't do. I think civility and common courtesy are really buried within everybody, but now we're in an age when people feel really embarrassed to be polite, and feel quite embarrassed to open doors for others. And I think that's sad, but it's only because I think that to be that courteous is considered to be quite weak and trivial.

***DEBRIS*: Don't you think that the tendency which has overtaken is the tendency towards violence?**
Oh, completely, completely. But this is because, in my opinion, of nuclear weapons. Because it seems that ultimately, regardless of what happens in the world, the only way to solve our disagreements is by violence, is by nuclear weapons. And as long as we live in a world where nuclear weapons are the only answer, and the ultimate answer after conversation has failed, I think people will be violent.

***DEBRIS*: How explicit is the link between personal violence in the home – or "Rusholme" – and institutionalised violence like the meat industry and war?**
It's completely connected. It all weaves in and it's all kind of embroidered to make one overall foul image. From the time that you get hit when you're a child, as covered in a song called "Barbarism Begins At Home", violence is the only answer. Conversation is pointless. And it continues through school. Certainly if you go to a working-class school.

***EYF*: Are you equating human violence towards fellow humans – "Barbarism", "The Headmaster Ritual" – with violence towards animals? Are you saying it's all the same thing?**
Yes, it is. Because violence towards animals, I think, is also linked to war. I think as long as human beings are so violent towards animals there will be war. It might sound absurd, but if you really think about the situation it all makes sense. Where there's this absolute lack of sensitivity where life is concerned, there will always be war. And, of course, there will always be war as long as there are people willing to fight wars in armies. Which is quite another matter, which I must cover one day on a B-side…

***DEBRIS*: Where did the image come from on the cover of the LP? That makes a link between war and, well, meat is murder.**
Yes, it does. And the link is that I feel animal rights groups aren't making any dramatic headway because most of their methods are quite peaceable, excluding one or two things. It seems to me now that when you try to change things in a peaceable manner, you're actually wasting your time and you're laughed out of court. And it seems to me now that as the image of the LP hopefully illustrates, the only way that we can get rid of such things as the meat industry, and other things like nuclear weapons, is by really giving people a taste of their own medicine.

***DEBRIS*: To be more specific, where do you stand on an issue like the Greenham women? They are using peaceful methods.**
Yes! And it's a total fiasco. It's failing. They're being kicked about, they're being thrown around, they're being laughed at, they're being shot. I think

ALAMY

it should register in their minds that it's not actually working. Something else has to be done.

***MM*: Violence has to be met by violence?**
Yes, it does. That's the tragedy. That's the massive tragedy of all these issues. It has to be, because of the present government, who can only think in violent terms. I wish it didn't. Personally, I'm an incurably peaceable character. But where does it get you? Nowhere. You have to be violent.

***ABSTRACT*: In that case, do you sympathise with the miners and the way they've been violent?**
Completely. I mean, just endless sympathy. What can one say? It's more distressing than most people realise, I think. I think it's the end if they go down, the absolute end. And, of course, it just simply proves once again that democracy in this country doesn't exist in any form.

***RO*: Have you received much feedback from your comments in your last *MM* interview about the Brighton bombing?**
Yes. I was hounded from pillar to post. Immediately after that, I went to Ireland and every time I woke up there was some journalist sitting on the end of the bed – but we won't go into that. Yes, that was just the absolute rope around the old… ah… young neck, and I couldn't get away from that. It seemed almost as if I was responsible for the assassination of Thatcher.

***IO*: Do you regret anything you said?**
No! I'll say it now and I'll say it louder and I'll say it any time you want me to say it.

***MM*: You believe in the idea of justified violence?**
Yes, I do. Because the violence in this case is in order to preserve the rest of civilisation. It's not simply violence because one is bored because it's raining and one wants something to do. It's self-protection. It's either them or us, as it were. I mean, when it gets to the issue of life and death, you have to protect yourself, don't you?

***DEBRIS*: Do you think you change people's minds through music?**
Yes. And I know that because people write to me, otherwise I wouldn't be aware of it… yes, it does seem to happen. It all comes down to the written word, I find. It all comes down to when people are alone in their bedrooms and they're actually listening to records and they're thinking about the words and then it seems to strike home with people…

***BUCKETFULL OF BRAINS*: Do you think they maybe use you as a crutch, because they can't sort out their problems for themselves?**
Yes, I think so. But that shouldn't really be a shameful thing. In a very fundamental way, everybody needs friends and a lot of people don't have them. And a lot of people who buy records believe that the artists who make the records are their friends. They believe that they know these people, and they believe that they're actually involved in these people's lives, and it's a comfort. We shouldn't have a condescending attitude to that.

***DEBRIS*: Are there any allies in your particular field of work – ie, pop music – who you consider can help you?**
No, I don't. I feel entirely alone. There are people that I like and there are people I admire, but I think ultimately we are alone. I really believe that, and I'm glad about that, because not being a part of the major music industry makes massive sense.

***RO*: Are there advantages to being an outsider?**
No. None whatsoever. It's a horrible life.

> "I'm incurably peacable, but where does it get you? Nowhere"

***MM*: What would your reaction have been if you'd been invited along to the Band Aid recording?**
I think I would have read the letter at least 18 times and then I would have begun to think about it. If I had listened to the record beforehand, I wouldn't have done it because I think it's tuneless and I think that's really important. I mean, it's one thing to want to save lives in Ethiopia, but it's another thing to inflict so much torture on the British public. So for that reason, I absolutely disapprove. It's quite easy to sit here and agree and feel very passionate about the cause. Everybody does. But what about the record? Nobody's actually mentioned that foul disgusting thing.

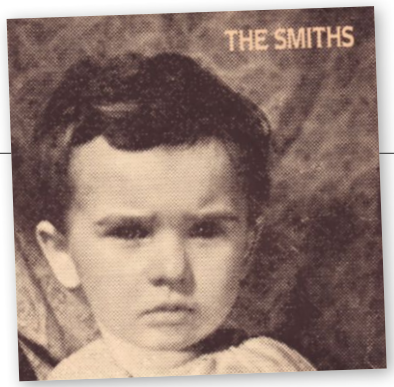
***MM*: Would you prefer just to make your own statements on these various issues?**
Yes, because I don't feel any alliance with people. We get numerous requests to do benefits, but although I believe in the causes, one has to look at the people involved. One has to look at the people who are in control and the way you're projected in this whole sphere. And I don't know them, so why should I really put faith in them? I feel that whatever we have to say, we'll do it on our own, which is perfectly fine.

***EYF*: What do you think of the news of moves being made to parole Myra Hindley?**
I think it's mildly laughable if the case itself weren't quite so serious. But I don't think it will ever happen. And if it ever happened she'd certainly regret it. So obviously I entirely oppose it, completely. I find it quite dramatic, though. She obviously believes she's somewhat of a film star. She wants to make a film. She wants to open an orphanage in Germany. I mean, the list of ambitions that she has is quite endless, and I think when one simply scans the list of her ambitions it's really like a certificate of her total insanity. So we need go no further than that.

***RO*: Did you anticipate the reaction to "Suffer Little Children"?**
Yes, I did. Yes, I did anticipate it – and when it arrived, I wasn't ready for it in the least. I was quite confused. I was very distressed by that, but I was only distressed because nobody would actually let me comment on it. It appeared in national newspaper the length and breadth of the country – Morrissey does this and Morrissey says that and Morrissey believes… and nobody asked me a thing. Nobody knew what I believed or why the lyrics were there. So that was the only distressing element. But I'm glad the record got attention, ultimately.

***MM*: Were you alarmed at the way the sentiments of the song, the basic concept, the basic sympathies of the song were so disfigured?**
Well, this is the world we live in. It's not a reflection of me, it really reflects the absolute and barbaric attitudes of the daily press, and so I don't really feel that I was in the dock, I feel that they were really. And in essence they were just really saying how narrow-minded and blundering they were. Some of the reports in newspapers in Portsmouth and Hartlepool – all the places that really count – some of the reports were so full of hate, it was like I was one of the Moors Murderers, that I'd gone out and murdered these children. Some of them were so full of hate that one just had to do something, but not read them. It was incredible.

***MM*: Do you think this is the price any writer or musician will have to pay for dealing with such bitterly sensitive subjects?**
It is, but the sad fact is that I don't think many other artists will actually be in that situation. Because when one considers the standard of writing in popular music, it's largely unlikely that anybody will be subjected to that. As before, the people who are saying strong things have no audience. They're in the »



independent market, they're not in the Top 40, so it doesn't matter. I wish it did, but it doesn't.

***MM*: So you see yourself in an increasingly unique position: you have a large audience to whom you can address these concerns and you're going to be noticed – has this made you nervous at all about tackling subjects so straightforwardly?**
No! It hasn't made me nervous, because I'm so dedicated and I'm really prepared to go down with the ship, whatever happens. And I'm prepared to risk everything, because I don't have anything else. This is all that I have and this is all that I am, and all those very dramatic statements… but it's absolutely true. So if somebody from the *Daily Mail* comes along and shoots me, that's the way it has to be. I'll die defending what I say.

***IO*: Is there a danger that you're abusing your position as a public figure and turning into a preacher?**
No, because everybody on a public platform is a preacher. But most people preach absolute monotony and it's accepted, but because I like to feel in an absolutely misguided way that I don't, everybody sticks their pins in me. Which is incredibly painful.

***RO*: Changing tack slightly, do you find now that, like with the songs on the new LP, people are aware of the subject matter before they've heard the songs – like "The Headmaster Ritual" and "How Soon Is Now?", for instance?**
I can't really see how they can be aware of it.

***RO*: Is it not on your mind at all?**
No, not really. I think there's a familiarity now which wasn't there before, because we hadn't made any records. But I don't really see how people can be aware completely, not really. I mean, I never felt any embarrassment about writing about school… I know it's been done before and it's been done very badly, but that didn't put me off. I still have things to say.

***RO*: The newer songs sound more straightforward – do you agree, and is that due to being misquoted and misinterpreted?**
I agree with it, I do agree with it, because I don't necessarily want to be ambiguous, because when you're ambiguous I feel people don't really grasp what you're on about. So that's quite defeatist, really. The whole intention really is to be as crystal clear as possible.

***MM*: Several of the songs on the new LP seem to have a much more direct and stronger narrative line than on the first LP…**
Yes, they do. That's certainly there. I didn't really have any intention of being misunderstood with the words on this LP. A lot of people wrote about the first LP and they said things that were very poetic and very interesting and absolutely inaccurate. So I just felt that on this LP people should really know which hammer I'm trying to nail, as it were.

***RO*: Sorry to seem obscure, but you did once refer to a track called "Father And Son". Did that emerge as "How Soon Is Now?"?**
No. It hasn't emerged. It's about to emerge, and I'm sure it will change your life.

***EYF*: Did you get beaten by masters at school?**
Yes. I wasn't really on the hit list, I wasn't one of those people who were dragged out every single day, but I found that I was certainly in the running for that. I always found that I was hit and beaten for totally pointless reasons, which is what I'm sure every pupil would say. But I think in my case I demand special consideration…

***MM*: So to what extent are we to take these songs as autobiography as opposed to social observations?**
I think they'll always be autobiography, and when the day arrives where I can't write in that sense or I'm drained, I'll just step down. I won't go on. There's nothing worse, really, than the writer, the singer, who's outlived their usefulness and who've really drained their diaries, as it were. Which I still haven't done. There's nothing more embarrassing and pointless and sad than that. So when I've drained the resources, I will step down, much to the relief, I'm sure, of the British public.

***DEBRIS*: Do you consider yourself to be an ordinary or an extraordinary person?**
I'm probably extraordinary.

***DEBRIS*: And yet a lot of ordinary people can feel great affinity with things that you write.**
That's because probably everybody's extraordinary and the minority of people in this world are very ordinary.

***EYF*: What's behind the fierce outspokenness against the work ethic in your lyrics?**
The realities of work, I think. The realities of being in a situation where you can't choose your employment, which is an awful way to be when you don't have any skills and you have to take what's dished out, take what's available. There's nothing worse in life than having no choice, I think. And this is tolerable, I think, in all areas except unemployment. When you have to take a job, even if it's a job you can mildly stomach, if you have to take it and you have no choice, merely the fact that you have no choice crushes your enthusiasm for doing the job.

***EYF*: Did your parents cram the work ethic down your throat when you were a child, and so you are rebelling against that?**
No. I lived with my mother, who didn't. She let me do what I wanted to do. She gave me absolutely full rein to be what I wanted to be, and that was very helpful. But, no… as a direct result of not wanting to take anything, I didn't work for years and years and years…

***EYF*: So your mother doesn't really resent your observations on your background?**
To this day, she's completely behind everything I say.

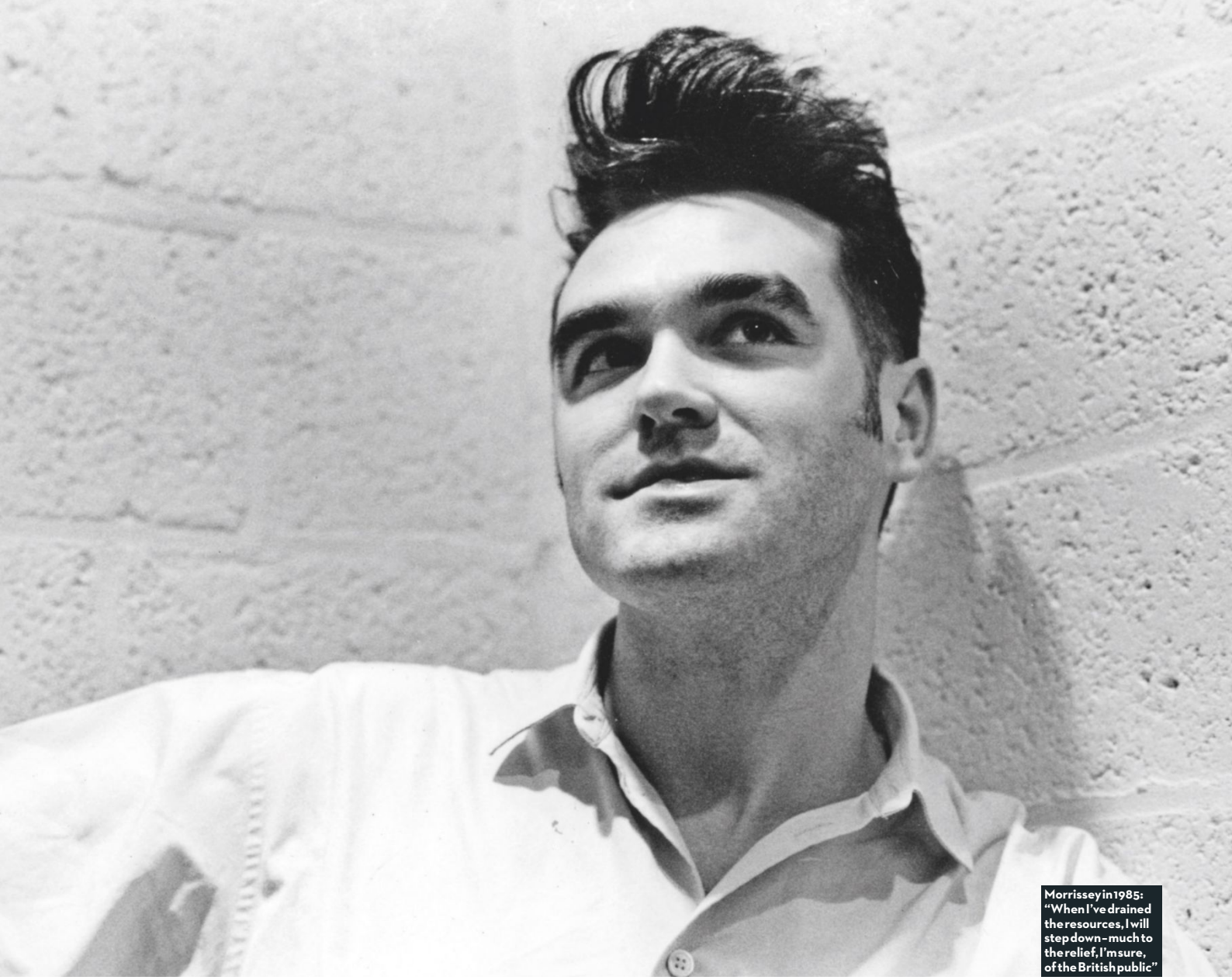
***MM*: Does she recognise the things that you write about?**
Completely. She dissects them, she completely dissects everything that happens. She reads every single interview. She produces long monologues… she's very, very much involved in what I do. And hers is the only opinion that I really take remotely seriously. So it's quite treasurable.

> "My mother's is the only opinion I take remotely seriously"

***RO*: Were you being slightly flippant when you said your love songs were written from total guesswork?**
No, I was being absolutely serious. Which isn't really funny.

***RO*: Where did a song like "Hand That Rocks The Cradle" come from?**
Well, that comes from a relationship I had that didn't really involve romance. So if we're talking about romance, well, I don't really know that much about it. But in other things, I'm quite capable of making an observation.

***RO*: An observation, in the way that "Girl Afraid" seems to be…**
Yes. I think "Girl Afraid" simply implied that even within relationships



Morrissey in 1985: "When I've drained the resources, I will step down – much to the relief, I'm sure, of the British public"

ROB VERHORST / ALAMY

there's no real certainty and nobody knows how anybody feels. People feel that just simply because they're having this cemented communion with another person, the two of you will become whole, which is something I detested. I hate that, that implication. It's not true, anyway. Ultimately, you're on your own, whatever happens in life, however you go through life. You die on your own. You have to go to the dentist on your own. It's like all the serious things in life are things that you feel on your own.

***RO*: Is the problem in relationships largely one of being inarticulate?**
Totally, yes. Totally. Which stems from… I seem to have an answer for everything, I know… but it really does stem from the society that we live in where the real things, the things that count, you're supposed to suppress…

***IO*: Did you ever make a conscious effort not to write about love?**
Yes, I think so.

***IO*: Do you think it's trivialised by other people?**
Completely, yes. It's just one-dimensional. They see it in a very flimsy way. In a way that's always perfect, whatever happens. Even when it's doomed and it fails, there's always some curious perfection to it. Like in a Lionel Richie video…

***DEBRIS*: How closely do you analyse your motives for doing things?**
Too closely. To a dramatic fault, really. I'll just have to stop and get a suntan and false teeth.

***BOB*: You're about to embark on a massive tour – what have you learned from previous experiences to avoid?**
Touring's interesting because it's fascinating to me to meet people. That sounds silly, but unless we actually tour we don't actually meet the people who buy our records. Which is strange. You can have a hit record, or whatever, and loads of people can buy your records, but you don't actually meet them. And I never meet Smiths' apostles ever – so it's only by touring that I can actually come face to face with these people.

***BOB*: Is that not one of the instances where you could use violence?**
Well, it is… but when you're just under six foot, you decide to retreat. It's the only thing. The next LP is called "Retreat!", actually…

***BOB*: Talking of the future…**
No, no, no, no, no… let's not talk about the future.

***BOB*: Well, talking about the present, do you expect to take a single off the LP?**
The next single is called "Shakespeare's Sister", a brand-new track, and it's obviously not a track from the new LP. But I feel quite edgy because something from the LP should be released, because I think they're too good to be buried.

***IO*: Do you think that everyone should listen to The Smiths?**
Well, I've not yet discovered a reason why they shouldn't.

***IO*: But earlier you were saying that people should have a choice…**
(*With a final mischievous flourish*) Well… in some cases they should. But it is nice to dictate occasionally. *Allan Jones* ●

February 12, 1985: Bangles singer/rhythm guitarist Susanna Hoffs and bassist Michael Steele at Dingwalls in Camden, North London

An acid haze of folk melody

MM FEB 23 The Bangles bring their glossy, attitude-filled guitar pop to a sweaty Camden club.

FOUR CALIFORNIA GIRLS in this overheated sewer? Shame! They made the best of it, though, with an urgent and good-humoured display of pop old and new.

Had The Bangles not chosen to exist, it might well have been necessary to reconstruct them from neglected but still vital components. Evidently, they pay homage to the Golden Age of California pop and the British invasion. A song like "Tell Me", which I think they played tonight (if not, it's undoubtedly on their forthcoming LP *All Over The Place*), can't fail to remind the pop historian of Beatles and early Byrds in its naive but shimmering charm.

Too much of this can soon cause sighs of impatience, however, with its relentless 4/4 job and limited melodic scope. Luckily, The Bangles have up their sleeves a handful of heart-stoppers. For example, their reading of Soft Boy Kimberley Rew's "Going Down To Liverpool" combines the girls' often wonderful four-part harmonies and chunky rhythmic thrust into an acid haze of folk melody and simple allusive power. Somehow it puts the pock-marked face of UK '85 into haunting long-focus. Shame about the video.

Lead guitarist Vicki Peterson obviously relished the available space of live performance

Natcho, The Bangles are custom-built for sexists. These girls are, to be blunt, attractive, but if they weren't, their confident attack and frequently explosive guitar onslaught should convince even the Spanish judge.

LONDON DINGWALLS LIVE! FEBRUARY 12

Lead guitarist Vicki Peterson obviously relished the available space of live performance, and her wracked soloing contrasted sharply with The Bangles' over-polite recorded sound.

Centre stage, the petite Susanna Hoffs seemed to be controlling operations with voice and guitar. "Hero Takes A Fall", the current single, erupted into a show-stopping display of controlled energy and cascading voices, with Susanne (mostly invisible through the oppressively dense crowd) playing both narrator and musical director. In "He's Got A Secret", Vicki's growling riff unfolded deftly into the song's neat pop heartbeat.

At times, The Bangles wandered off onto unfocused areas of drab pop-by-numbers, but their best songs were thrilling stuff indeed. Just what the world needs now... California sun, with reasoning faculties.

Adam Sweeting

ANDREW CATLIN

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

"Bombastic"

NME MAR 23 Tina Turner gives it both barrels in a huge venue.

SOMEHOW WHEN THAT first inevitable round of thunderous applause erupted and Tina Turner stood there, bathing in a lone spotlight, you couldn't help but feel some small pang of admiration inside for this woman. Against all odds, four nights at Wembley, a brand-new audience and top of the world, ma. But why the tea and sympathy?

Because she married Ike and let him humiliate her for years without a whisper? Because, after years of struggle, she's finally hit the proverbial? And what exactly has Tina got to do with it all? In other words, who turned Tina? The most recognisable culprits are Mark Knopfler and Heaven 17. The latter with a fussy, superficially produced version of "Let's Stay Together"; and the former with "Private Dancer", a sentimental, patronising song wherein all the woman can yearn for is "*to raise some kids and have a family*".

If Turner's career represents some kind of feminist victory, as was intimated by *Time Out*'s revealing interview last week, Knopfler managed in one stroke of his pen to freeze that particular angle.

How aware is Turner of this? And what's the difference between the way that Turner has been moulded and, say, the latest CBS signing? Her performance gave no answers but did establish that in her current phase the voice does remain intact, a spirited, attacking instrument that provided the only outlet for any kind of response.

Certainly the (mainly American) band that backed her had no kind of feeling for subtlety, grace or elegance. A twin guitar group; a bombastic, insensitive ensemble that churned out all the old tricks and cliches. Miss Turner, of course, revelled in the sound, probably labouring under the mistaken impression that it still represents some kind of musical wildness.

Turner has never, as such, been a soul artiste in the traditional sense. And there's nothing wrong with her attempting rock. What's wrong is that she does so with such a brutal approach. Thus "River Deep" is massacred by a barrage of guitars; "Nutbush City Limits" reduced to a mindless melee of scraps; and "Proud Mary" becomes too "Loud And Hairy".

At the end, Tina duetted with Bryan Adams – a fitting finale – and left her over-30 audience throwing their Barclay cards up in the air with wild enthusiasm. In the end, it's not so much Tina Turner but the company she keeps. *Paolo Hewitt*

WEMBLEY STADIUM, LONDON
LIVE!
MARCH 15

Former Frantic Elevator "Red", aka Mick Hucknall

LONDON ULU
LIVE!
FEBRUARY 25

Al Green comparisons

MM MAR 2 Simply Red show how post-punk soul is really done.

EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT without its black roots most pop would amount to even less than it does now. You don't have to be a musicologist to work this out. Check the current charts – yes Mr Wholemeal himself, the prince of the worldly platitude, Howard "Nice Guy" Jones, has clearly found it pays to funk. But fortunately, here we don't have to bother ourselves with the burning questions that keep the Jones boy awake at night – what is soul anyway? Does anybody know what soul is? Etc. No, the real problem is this: simply, can they do it? Can these white boys really move you from the rear?

The sad answer is frequently a hollow "no." Remember the post-punk trend for white funk? ABC aside, they only had a few good singles and a dubious line in camp.

But things have changed. Now, at least, some groups can play their stuff, albeit sometimes in the most rudimentary way. Some are actually exciting – witness the new Nick Heyward – but others are merely competent. And they are everywhere.

Talking Heads' "Heaven" was transformed into a dreamy soul ride

So maybe things haven't changed that much, maybe you still have to look to the States for the real thing...or do you? Simply Red only came together in January, and in the time it takes Billy Mackenzie to record a drum track, have grown into one of the most formidable outfits going... on either side of the water.

They are based around ex-Frantic Elevator vocalist Red, and judging from only their second London appearance they've not just mastered their chosen field but look capable of developing a style that incorporates a sweeping range of influences. Red has been compared somewhat optimistically with Al Green, and the inclusion of his "Love And Happiness" in the set points to their touchstone, but significantly, they carry off this song with all the tenderness it undoubtedly requires.

The same could be said of their cover of Talking Heads' "Heaven", for their purposes transformed into a dreamy soul ride of sheer lost-in-space pleasure. And as for their version of The Valentine Brothers' ace "Money's Too Tight To Mention", they manage to surpass the original.

On one hearing it's difficult to judge the strength of their own material, of which they have plenty, but as their confidence grew it was obvious there was much to be optimistic about.

Launching off the Al Green classic as if it were a springboard, they particularly impressed with pieces like "No Direction", "Holding Back The Years" and "Open The Red Box". Full marks to the horn section as well. Their flexibility allows the band to slip easily into reggae and then soar off Rip Rig And Panic style right up to those mile-high blue jazz skies.

Apparently blessed with more flexibility and range than Bronski Beat, and quite possibly more true grit than The Kane Gang, Simply Red could be the group to make all those soul cliches come alive.

As Karl Marx said from the grave: better red than dead! *Ian Pye*

ANDREW CATLIN

1985

APRIL – JUNE

SCRITTI POLITTI, REM, TOM PETTY, HÜSKER DÜ, THE POGUES AND MORE

"I'm going to look for the ladder"

NME APRIL 13 Prince to retire from playing live.

PRINCE HAS DECLARED that he is to retire from live performances at the end of his current American tour. His last live show will be at the Miami Orange Bowl on 7 April, and he reckons that thereafter he'll never again play a public concert. He now intends to concentrate on working in the film and recording studios, although his own enigmatic response to media questions about his future was: "I'm going to look for the ladder."

This substantiates his recent pledge that he would never perform in Britain owing to the adverse UK media reaction to his appearance at the BPI Awards ceremony. But this display of sour grapes was obviously prompted by his impending stage retirement.

However, his legion of followers may be consoled by the release of a new Prince LP by Warners on 26 April. Titled *Around The World In A Day*, it comprises 10 self-penned, self-arranged and self-produced tracks (one of which is called "The Ladder").

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES / GETTY

"*Party over, oops, out of time*": Prince in concert in L.A in 1985 before announcing a discontinuation of live performances

Queen, seen here at the first Rock In Rio festival in Jan '85, to appear at Live Aid along with U2 (below) and many more

Jimmy Somerville with Steve Bronski (right) and Larry Steinbachek (top)

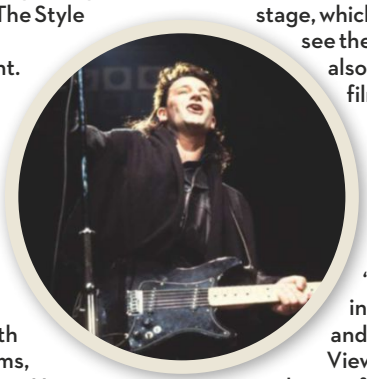
"We must give them a life"

MM JUN 15 A big summer event, "Live Aid", will continue the success of Band Aid.

THE BIGGEST, MOST spectacular live event in the history of rock music is to be staged next month by the superstars of Band Aid.

A massive concert is taking place at Wembley Stadium on Saturday, July 13. Another, at an unannounced American venue, will be held simultaneously. And a satellite link-up will beam the shows live to a billion television viewers worldwide.

At Wembley, the bill features David Bowie, U2, Wham!, Paul Young, Spandau Ballet, Dire Straits, Phil Collins, Bryan Ferry, Queen, Sting, Ultravox, Elton John, Alison Moyet, Howard Jones, Nik Kershaw, a specially reformed Status Quo, Sade, The Style Council, Elvis Costello, the Boomtown Rats and Adam Ant.

The American show brings together Duran Duran, Bob Dylan, Neil Young, The Power Station, Robert Plant, the Pretenders, Santana, Simple Minds, Paul Simon, Thompson Twins, Tears For Fears, Billy Ocean, Billy Joel, The Cars, Eric Clapton, Hall & Oates with The Temptations, Bryan Adams, Judas Priest, Kris Kristofferson, Huey Lewis And The News and Waylon Jennings.

All of the artists are giving their services for free – and the organisers are quick to point out that "no pressure was put on any of them to do this... We just let them know it was happening." More names may be added to both bills.

Each act will perform a short set – probably around 20 minutes. And throughout the TV coverage, a telethon service will be in operation, by which viewers can phone in and pledge a donation to the Band Aid appeal. Bob Geldof, speaking for what will now be known as Live Aid, said this week: "We have kept millions alive, that's all. Now we must give them a life."

The concerts were announced at Wembley Stadium on Monday by Geldof, English promoters Harvey Goldsmith and Maurice Jones, and US promoter Bill Graham. Goldsmith said: "This is, quite categorically, the most important concert of all time."

The Wembley show, which will be attended by 72,000 people, kicks off at 12 noon. The organisers have installed two giant Diamondvision screens on either side of the stage, which will enable the audience to see the various acts close up and also, during breaks, to watch live film from the US concert.

The satellite link-up has been achieved by co-operation between the BBC in Britain and ABC and MTV in America. Television coverage – described as a "global jukebox" – extends into Eastern Bloc countries and to China.

Viewers in Britain expect up to 15 hours of live music. Broadcasting starts in the early afternoon on BBC2, and the live film from Wembley will be intercut with clips from the States when their concert starts several hours later. After the close of the Wembley show, around 10pm, the BBC will relay the rest of the US gig – due to finish at 3am, our time.

Tickets for Wembley are on sale from Friday, June 14, at £25 each, which includes a donation to Band Aid.

DAVE HOGAN / GETTY; MIKE PRIOR / GETTY; PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

"No hard feelings"

MM APR 27 Jimmy Somerville quits Bronski Beat.

JIMMY SOMERVILLE HAS finally walked out on Bronski Beat – disillusioned with the pressures of success. Somerville, who sparked off a wave of speculation after turning his back on the band for "a breather" in February, has already launched a new musical venture. Larry Steinbachek and Steve Bronski will retain the name Bronski Beat, and they're currently formulating new plans for the future.

A spokesman for Forbidden Fruit / London Records said this week: "Jimmy's decision to leave was brought on by his reluctance to accept the pressures of the business of success, and he felt that the business was taking over from the sheer fun of singing.

"He has teamed up with classically trained sax player and multi-instrumentalist Richard Coles, calling themselves The Committee. They intend using other musicians whenever necessary, but not on a permanent basis. Jimmy has described his music as an experiment with sounds – more acoustic than electronic – and together they have written about six songs."

In a statement this week, Steinbachek and Bronski said: "There are no hard feelings between us and Jimmy, and we both wish him the best of luck in his future project."

A new Bronski Beat single is set for July release, an album should follow in the autumn, and a remixed 12-inch version is out this week. Steinbachek and Bronski have set up their own recording studio for the new Bronski Beat work.

Not entirely abandoned

NME APR 20 The Beatles reject an outtakes album, but don't rule one out.

The Beatles on the *Night Of A Hundred Stars* show at the London Palladium, July 23, 1964

YOU MAY BE tired of the incessant "Beatles to reform" rumours, but a new Fab Four LP of 13 previously unissued tracks called *Sessions* was almost a reality when EMI planned an official release this year.

The scheme was so far advanced that EMI had published an internal "Master Record Acceptance" document, with a full tracklisting, running times, composer credits and even a catalogue number. Produced by George Martin and remixed by Geoff Emerick, the recordings cover the period from 1963 to '69, mainly comprising outtakes. But objections from Paul, George and Ringo stopped the release.

Says EMI's public relations manager Brian Southall: "The company prepared a blueprint – chose a selection of tracks, produced sleeve artwork and then presented it to the relevant Beatles. And they turned it down."

Apparently, respected EMI engineer John Barrett devoted what little time he had left in the last year of his life to cataloguing the countless hours of Beatles tapes at Abbey Road, and in the process discovered material only rumoured to have been recorded. And it was from Barrett's finds that the *Sessions* album was compiled.

However, Southall hinted that although the surviving Fab Three didn't approve the EMI selection, an LP of hitherto unreleased tracks hasn't been entirely abandoned.

Had Macca and his mates given the thumbs-up, what would have been on offer, and would you have wanted it?

A suggested single matched a cover of Little Willie John's 1959 R'n'B hit "Leave My Kitten Alone" with an alternative version of "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da". A *Beatles For Sale* reject (it would have proved one too many cover jobs), "Leave My Kitten Alone" was – if rumours are ever to be believed – almost issued a couple of years ago with a cover of Carl Perkins' "Lend Me Your Comb" as companion.

The latter doesn't show up among the 13 suggested *Sessions* cuts. Side One would have opened with McCartney's original version of "Come And Get It" – the song he gifted Apple Beatle-clones Badfinger for the *Magic Christian* soundtrack. "Leave My Kitten Alone" followed, after which The Beatles interpreted a Hari Georgeson composition, "Not Guilty". An alternate version of "I'm Looking Through You" then gave way to the much bootlegged "What's The New Mary Jane?". A second under six minutes, this track (which originally carried a Plastic Ono Band credit) was shortlisted as a *White Album* possible and a *Let It Be* B-side definite. A typical Lennon ramble of the period.

Apple Corp argy-bargy caused it to be dropped at the last minute in favour of "You Know My Name".

Another frequently bootlegged curio opened Side Two: "How Do You Do It?". Destined to become Gerry & The Pacemakers' first chart-topper, this Mitch Murray tune was originally presented to the Fabs by George Martin as a possible follow-up to the moderately successful "Love Me Do". The lads rejected the idea but went through the motions of recording it, before an obstinate Lennon fished out "Please Please Me" and won the day.

Track two, "Besame Mucho", showcases McCartney as scampi-in-the-basket crooner and harks back to their earliest days in Hamburg. The title once showed up in an early *Let It Be* tracklisting. A rockin' 1963 version of a *Let It Be* mainstay, "One After 909", accounts for the third cut.

Ringo's token feature is the *Rubber Soul* outtake "If You've Got Trouble", while Paul takes lead on "That Means A Lot" – the Lennon & McCartney original given to P J Proby back in 1965.

The intended last track proper was George's acoustic version of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps", complete with extra verse, while the last three minutes of *Sessions* were given over to snippets from Beatles Fan Club discs – "Mailman Blues" and "Christmas Time (Is Here Again)".

As the project is still on indefinite hold, one can only expect the bootlegger to prove most enterprising. And I won't even begin to make a book on how long it will take all vested interest to legitimately liberate all the songs The Beatles recorded for the Beeb but not EMI. *Roy Carr*

Police are investigating

MM MAY 18 Trouble with the "outmoded" Wham! fan club.

WHAM! HAVE OFFICIALLY wound up their fan club following problems and complaints from the public. And it's believed that the police are now investigating the management behind the club after a Sunday national paper revealed that many fans had sent subscription money and received nothing in return. In a letter to fans, George Michael says: "We have changed the staff a number of times in the last two years to run an efficient, value-for-money-club. Unfortunately, as anyone who joined the club knows, things didn't turn out that way. Now all we can do is make sure that everyone gets their money back and hope that the events of the past six months have not bred too much bad feeling. In the early 1970s, if a person wanted information the fan club could provide it. But these days, with so much exposure of pop stars in the media, the idea of a three-monthly club magazine had become completely outmoded. We have found it impossible to run a club which we felt gave its members value for money in the way of exclusive material, and that fact [...] has led us to the decision that it will be fairer to everyone if we do not reopen it."

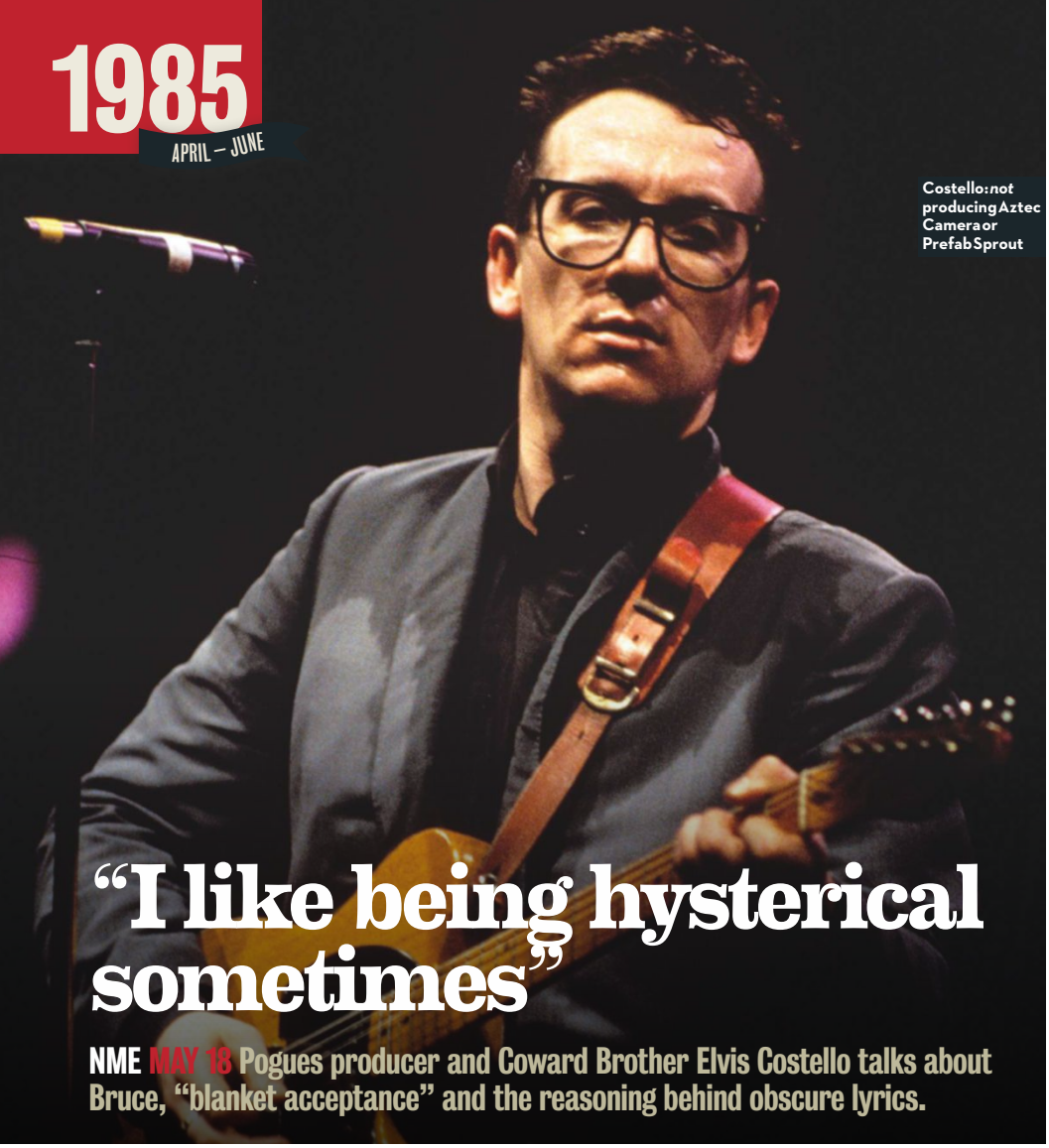
To compensate, Wham! will be offering fans advance warning of future British concerts and details of official merchandise.

➤ Motörhead celebrate their 10th anniversary with a special party concert at the Hammersmith Odeon on June 29. Tickets for the gig – billed as A Night To Remember – are on sale now at the box office and usual agents at £5 and £4.50 a throw. Lemmy commented: "It's going to be a very silly night and we want everyone to bring a birthday cake and, on my command, smash it into the face of the person sitting next to you. Ten years have gone, and there's only 990 to go." He also promised "complete mayhem and plenty of surprise guests". Motörhead follow the show with tours of Scandinavia and the States. *MM Jun 8*

➤ The Cult withdrew this week from a major anti-heroin benefit gig due to be held at London's Royal Festival Hall on July 5. The band's management are refusing to give any reasons for the withdrawal. *MM Jun 29*

➤ Former Visage frontman Steve Strange is going solo. He announced this week that he has severed all connections with Rusty Egan, Visage and Metropolis Music and is now recording with a new band. He hopes to tour Britain within the next few months. *MM Jun 1*

KEYSTONE / GETTY; TONY MOTTRAM / GETTY; MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY



Costello: *not* producing Aztec Camera or Prefab Sprout

"I like being hysterical sometimes"

NME MAY 18 Pogues producer and Coward Brother Elvis Costello talks about Bruce, "blanket acceptance" and the reasoning behind obscure lyrics.

LAST WEEK WE thrilled to Elvis Costello in his IMP Records boss hat – you know, the straw ice-cream-salesman number. Today we find him in a more relaxed mood, padding around in the comfy old carpet slippers of pop's grouchy but lovable Uncle Brian, as he is fondly known in our last remaining haunts of the soulful semi-quaver and passion-filled G-string.

Do you relish your avuncular role?

"Wha'?!?"

Like, your bestowal of approval, on such as Aztec Camera and Prefab Sprout?

"My impression of Prefab Sprout was with three gigs, and it was as if I'd produced their record or something. They're responsible for their own failings; they're their own band and nothing to do with me. I thought their things on the first four singles were a load of nonsense, and I feel the same way about Aztec Camera. I *hated* seeing my name linked with all these people. It's just lazy journalism."

As for the second Pogues LP...

"Conspicuously, I'm not producing Aztec Camera or Prefab Sprout, but I am producing this album. Deduce what you want from that. And I believe there's a version of 'A Pair Of Brown Eyes' being recorded on the other side of the Atlantic by my brother Coward..." [aka lanky Texan songsmith T-Bone Burnett, live collaborator with the solo Costello late last year as The Coward Brothers].

"He's producing a Peter Case album, who is in The Plimsouls, who at last has found his voice."

Meanwhile, The Coward Brothers' first single is released in June or July.

"It's a cultural clash between bluegrass and Italian Communism. It's like The Louvin Brothers backed by The Pretty Things."

Is the US trad-rock renaissance a genuine event or a figment of the music papers' imagination?

"Ask the bands sitting where they are, and I think they'll tell you it's a figment of the imagination, because they're still struggling to get a gig. You try and find The Beat Farmers in Los Angeles and you'll find them on a college station struggling to get on the radio, and they're being lauded here as the Next Big Thing.

"A lot of the bands are really good, but the danger is that's a blanket acceptance thing. Once you get a movement, it's here-we-go-again, the Two-Tone thing, the mod revival. One band might be good and the other half dozen a load of rubbish.

"I can name half a dozen bands in America that I think are really great, which I can't in England. So that means to me that American music is more interesting at the moment, simply because they're the records I chose to play. But that doesn't mean a blanket acceptance of everything American.

"What I really hate is the mindless racist attitude of the English audience to American acts simply because they're American. It's beneath people to take exception to people simply because you don't like the politics of the country. It's ignorant. It's parallel to the very thing people are supposed to be railing at.

"You've got to be careful of this blanket acceptance of American music. It brings out this whole new brand of conservatism with a small 'c' because it's so traditional and everything. But the alternative to that is this pseudo-sensationalism that you have with Prince and Frankie Goes To Hollywood.

"I think Bruce Springsteen's a very sincere person who's had his life stolen from him by success. He's not apparently affected by it in the ordinary sense, but his amount of moves has been limited, which is a shame. But he still writes the odd good song."

How about Britain's own Bruce: is Billy Bragg opening up our ears to a more dissenting rock'n'roll?

"Well, I dunno. There are some people listening to him and there are other people talking at the back. I wish him all the very best. I think he's sincere and I really like his stuff. I did a show with him at the Logan Hall and it was extraordinary, the feeling he had."

Is Elvis' prolific diversification in the last six months a consequence of a fallow period as a writer and performer?

"I just decided it'd been seven years without any longer than a month's break and two years with five days' holiday. I thought it was a good time to stop, because I was getting bored. Not even bored, really. I was working on complete nervous energy for the last couple of months last year. I was playing longer and longer shows – it was a sort of hysterical energy you get when you're tired. I *like* being hysterical sometimes."

Goodbye Cruel World reconsidered?

"I think it's the worst record of the best songs that I've written. I'm not saying that the songs are better than any other I've written. It's the worst realised. If an explanation doesn't illuminate beyond the action, then there's no point to it. And equally, the action is pointless if you have to explain. There's always a dilemma in choosing the thin line between explaining everything and robbing people of their imaginative process and leaving it open to interpretation and things being lost.

"I think *Goodbye Cruel World* is the worst record of the best songs I've written"

"My reasoning behind writing lyrics which sometimes people say are obscure is they're deliberately supposed to stimulate. Maybe one of the failures of the last record was that there were very good stories in some of the songs which the music didn't illuminate, so for me to illuminate them now is pointless."

Very succinct. Any last words?

"Er, goodbye?" *Mat Snow*

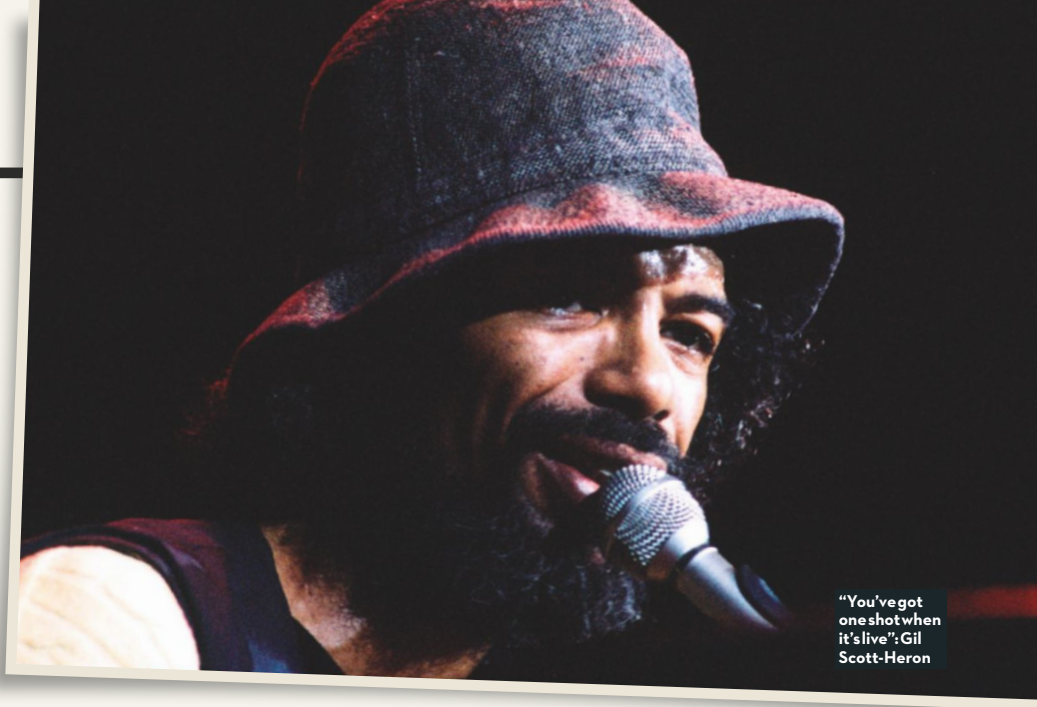
BRIAN RASIC / GETTY

SHRINK RAP!

GIL SCOTT-HERON

MM JUNE 29

Another pop ego on the psychiatrist's chaise longue.



"You've got one shot when it's live": Gil Scott-Heron

Statues

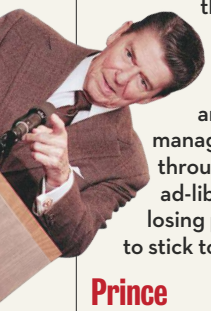
General Ulysses S Grant – there's a statue of him in the middle of Washington DC because he was once elected president, even though I understand he should have been a candidate for AA. That's one of my favourites... The birds love it!

MTV

Never. I don't ever have it on in my house.

"B-Movie"

It's just a re-run. I'm really not into sequels per se, but if I'm writing about something, and the people involved keep doing the same things, I feel obligated to keep commenting on it. The original song was written 10 days after Reagan's first inauguration, and I was working out how he'd managed it. You know that halfway through his campaign he started ad-libbing and immediately started losing points to Carter, so they told him to stick to his script – I just loved it.



Prince

What a midget! I don't think I've ever heard one of his records all the way through.

Credit cards

That's just another word for debt. I had one once, and it took me years to pay off, and eventually they took it back. I don't think it's a good idea for poor people, but they don't allow poor people to have them anyway.

Touring

It's so alive. I don't really like to travel, but I like the feeling of playing once I get there. You have one shot when it's live. Then you've either got it or you don't.

Hip hop

It's such fun. The kids love it, and I like to see them have fun. When I was 12, you couldn't tell me that Chubby Checker, The Temptations and James Brown weren't relevant. I personally wouldn't hip or hop to most of it, but they enjoy it, so it has to be good.

Nixon

Out of here! The Ex-Officio Blues. I still see him on TV, just like I also see *Lassie*, *Leave It To Beaver* and all those other programmes that aren't relevant any more.

Misfortune

Constant. As a matter of fact, I've just been writing a song about it. It'll be the first reading of this particular trip, and goes something like this:

Misfortune, is a costume ball
I came as Mr E, she came as Miss Demeanour
I call her Miss Leading, but mistaken was much cleaner
She climbed the poetries – Jim Dandy on the branches
She called it being free, I called the ambulances
Lines of communication misdirects all that I am;
Ounces pound my reservations,
Miscalculate loves Billy Gram
She was misunderstood while she knew everything
It was misapplication to miss what nothing means...

Chimps

Tarzan Of The Apes or *Bedtime For Bonzo*. That film was such good satire. The night Reagan got elected, some TV channel played Reagan movies with the chimp all night long. We spent all night rolling around on the floor and just couldn't believe this guy was president. Only in America!

The Last Poets

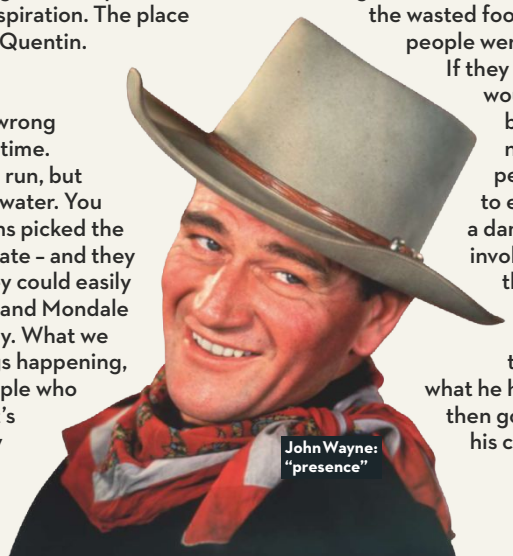
Niggers that are scared of revolution. They epitomise white racism. I think they have some kind of superiority complex. If you can't remember the day before you became aware, then that's selective amnesia. They think they have all the answers to the world's problems. I'm glad somebody does... So does Attila The Haig.

Soweto

There's so much anger and depression mixed in with hope and inspiration. The place reminds me of San Quentin.

Walter Mondale

Wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time. They had to let him run, but he was dead in the water. You see, the Republicans picked the Democratic candidate – and they picked the man they could easily beat. Both Reagan and Mondale represent yesterday. What we need are new things happening, new ideas, and people who seem to know what's going on now. They feed people crap, and if they don't swallow all that flag bullshit, they try and make them feel unpatriotic. Now is the time to be real; especially for all those people who are being jammed by this counterfeit prosperity. I was raised to feel that the things I was talking about were unpatriotic, because I didn't say Sieg Heil, and because I didn't accept all the things that America says it is. I accept half of it, but found out it was the wrong half.



John Wayne: "presence"

Death

I'm not afraid of dying, I'm just afraid of all the exaggerated shit that's gonna be said about me after I'm gone. People always ask me how I want to be remembered, but I don't really give a...

"Disco Duck"

No one will remember it now. Only songs that are balanced well will ever last. The songs you can hear two years and two days later and still have something to say. The classics are all those songs that created a mood that is still relevant today.

John Wayne

Here comes yesterday again. He seems corny now sometimes, but when those films first came out I thought he was a tremendous presence. He filled up the 60ft stage with great flicks like *The Quiet Man*.

Band Aid

It's a great idea. I did a poem called "We Beg Your Pardon" back in '75, all about the wasted food in the States while people were starving in Africa. If they had done it in '75 it would have been great, but better late than never. As long as people get something to eat I don't really give a damn if the people involved are using it for their own ends. If that sort of person were elected king tomorrow, and that's what he had planned yesterday, then good luck to him. It's on his conscience.

STEVE CALLAGHAN / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK; HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY; BETTMANN / GETTY

"We may shock them!"

TOM PETTY is back. His time off the treadmill has allowed him to reimmerse himself in American culture – and to make one of his strongest, strangest albums yet. "I've got a little bored of being put in this club of Bruces, Bobs..." he says. "I've staked out our own ground."

— MELODY MAKER MAY 11 —

"***THE FUTURE AIN'T*** *what it used to be.*" Tom Petty sings that on *Southern Accents*, and seldom can a line have captured so effectively the attitude behind an artistic renaissance.

Petty, the Southern boy, the blond bombshell who eulogised the "American Girl" – the Byrds pastiche so pure it's said that when Roger McGuinn heard it on the radio, he was convinced it was one of his songs, but couldn't remember writing or performing it.

Petty is probably the epitome of all that's cool about American rock – that smart-ass swagger, those cheekbones, that cruising feeling, that sneer and smile, that raunch that goes way, way back – and what's more, is damned, fighting proud of it. A still point in time. The American dream.

Petty, a kind of Huck Finn from Gainesville, Florida, who made it all come true.

Petty, the boy and his band, The Heartbreakers, a bunch of buddies from back home who'd played every jukebox hit in every jiveass joint so many times they not only sounded like the real thing, they believed it.

Petty, the pale prima donna on the up who boogied his butt around Hammersmith Odeon on a night some of us will never forget, the scarecrow prince at Knebworth with the battered jet-black topper at a rakish angle on those thinning blond strands, the star at Wembley with five albums down, sleep-walking through one of the saddest shows I've ever witnessed. »

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

SOUTHERN COMFORT

July 13, 1985: Tom Petty backstage at the JFK Stadium in Philadelphia, where his band The Heartbreakers will open the US leg of the Live Aid event with "American Girl"

Petty, the man whose third LP, *Damn The Torpedoes*, rates with Big Star's *Radio City* and The Byrds' *(Untitled)* as one of my desert island guitar discs. Petty, the hanger-out and hanger-on who duetted with Stevie Nicks and found his face on TV.

Tom Petty – all that's best and a bit that's worst about rock'n'roll.

Some of us, as I say, were worried after Wembley. His last album, *Long After Dark*, was harder, more *Broooce*, than anything he'd ever done, but maybe it was so much muscling over the same old terrain? More worrying still, there was silence. Over two years of the stuff.

Why?

Petty, my fantasy double, grins behind McGuinn shades in a shuttered office off Sunset Boulevard, LA.

"Ah… well…"

The drawl is unmistakable, the same slow nasal agonising that's more droll than dumb.

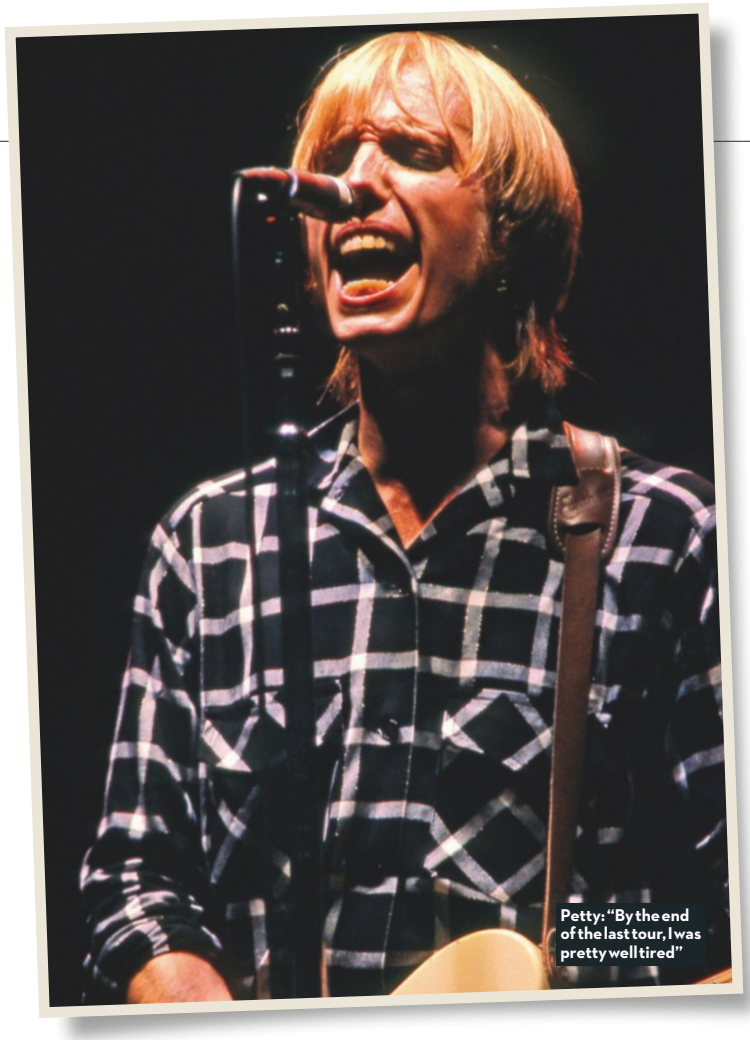
"Ah… well… for a lot of reasons. When I got to the end of the last tour, I was pretty well tired, y'know, and I wanted out for a while. We'd never really had a break since… but I don't know when… so I thought I'd push my chair back from the table for a while. I had a good year, I guess, of really doing nothing but writing. I'd never had that much time before.

"I was a little bored with what we were doing, to be honest. I didn't wanna have to go out and play 'Breakdown' any more. I just thought, 'Well, it's nine years now, and if we're gonna continue to do this, I think it's important that we hit something that keeps us interested.'"

What inspired Petty, what forged the concept that built and then disintegrated into his new album, *Southern Accents*, was his rediscovery of his roots – not musical (far from it), but cultural.

"I'd started the album mid-tour, in the South, when we were spending some time there. Instead of a bus, we had a chartered jet and we were based in Florida, flying out every day and flying home at night. So I just wound up staying there more than I had for years – y'know, other than a few days, I'd never been back in 10 years and I started realising there was really a lot down there that I'd forgotten and a lot that had changed.

"There were a lot of memories, and I had the ability to look at it as an outsider, too – I saw things I never would have seen if I'd stayed there and it just kicked me off."


Petty: "By the end of the last tour, I was pretty well tired"

ALAMY

ORIGINALLY, PETTY ENVISAGED *Southern Accents* as a double, entirely devoted to his rediscovery and, in some cases, rejection of the new South. It wasn't to be Neil Young's apocalyptic warning of impending racial upheavals, nor Lynyrd Skynyrd beer 'n' titties macho paeans; more a personal evocation couched in the everyday, the way Robbie Robertson worked at his best, the smallest incident triggering off a series of historical echoes that have set into habits.

Then Petty saw what he considers sense, and having written the bulk of the material, decided against the full-blown concept on the premise that it would bore the pants off most folks. The songs that remain from his private obsession – "Rebels", the title track and "Best Of Everything" – suggest that maybe, in the future, Petty should have a little more faith in his listeners.

During his hiatus, Petty also discovered that life has more to offer than a bottle of bourbon in the back of a limo – a realisation which drew him into some alien situations.

> "I didn't wanna have to go out and play 'Breakdown' any more"

"Stopping touring made the album much more easy to write. Everyone says it, but it's true: the more you get wrapped up in 'a plane, a car, a gig and then you're off, gonna make a record and then you're gonna go right out again', you just quit living life pretty much, y'know? During that year I had off it was, 'Wow! There's no soundcheck at four.' You're on your own and you've gotta figure out what to do.

"I travelled around, y'know. I went to the South a couple of times and I'd just do things that I wouldn't have been able to do, like say, 'It's eight o'clock, let's go to Las Vegas!' There was no 'No you can't go to Las Vegas because next Tuesday there's a gig in Seattle' and stuff like that.

"It wasn't really like I was being a prisoner before, but I was just caught in the work routine too much, and so I went to England for a week or two and I just found myself writing without even noticing it, without really taking it serious, whereas, with the *Long After Dark* album, I was really struggling to write that thing, just to write 10 songs that I thought were of the calibre to be on a record.

"This one just seemed to come naturally, so I think that had a lot to do with it – I've gotta be careful not to get into that routine again."

Revitalised lyrically, Petty could have turned out another set of breezy rockers and doleful country laments about birds and booze and broken hearts filleted by that jangly guitar, but where *Southern Accents* really stands out is not so much lyrically as musically. Petty's resisted the temptation to take the easy way out, avoided the self-parody that, he admits, he's only just skirted on several occasions, and he's gone for something startlingly new. I've never heard anything like it.

"No," he laughs. "No, neither have I."

While most of the so called young guns of America – your Dream Syndicates and Long Ryders – are plundering the back catalogue of Yankee pop for something true and real, some sense of history and meaning and belonging, some heritage and integrity in an art that's almost entirely surrendered its soul to corporate cloning, Petty's struck out on his own, not exactly turning his back on the past but refusing to accept that the only way forward is back.

"Exactly. It's interesting you noticed that. Since I've been doing interviews again, which I haven't done in years, people have been talking about American rock'n'roll, and I think that's fine, certainly that's OK with me, but it's almost a little too nostalgic at times. I think they've come to think that American rock has got to be straight-ahead, no more than a couple of guitars and a piano and you can't blow it, but that's rubbish, y'know. Like, I think my record is very American – there's even a song called 'America' – but it's certainly not Chuck Berry. I'm glad to see all those guys out there and stuff, but I just hope it doesn't mean we're gonna have another bout of nostalgia."

Southern Accents, with its sitar here and funk-out there, is like some crazy hybrid that really shouldn't work but does, effortlessly. How? Why? Where did it come from?

"Well, I wasn't listening to much, so I don't think I was hearing things. I'd kind of given up on the radio and stuff. I think it was a couple of things – one was that I was in the mood to do something a little strange, and two I was building a studio [Gone Gator] at home, where you tend to go a little

nuts and you don't really worry about cutting the song in three arrangements because it's not costing by the hour. So I did a lot of that – some of these songs might have had two sets of lyrics and three or four arrangements."

Strangely enough, though, *Southern Accents* is one of the least indulgent records you're ever likely to hear. Despite its shattered concept, it works as an *album*. There are no fillers, no two tracks remotely the same, all fragments torn from Petty's new-found sense of pioneering and The Heartbreakers' (who, Petty says, would probably tour eternally given the chance) fresh experiences.

> "We'd shunned having people sit in on the albums"

While Petty was pottering around at home, the others were out fulfilling ambitions and following their instincts. Mike Campbell co-wrote "The Boys Of Summer" with Don Henley and "Ways Of The Wicked" for up-and-coming country rock band Lone Justice; while Stan Lynch toured with T Bone Burnett and Howie Epstein backed John Hiatt. On top of this, in bits or as a whole, The Heartbreakers contributed to albums by Henley, Dylan, Stevie Nicks, Del Shannon, The Blasters, Rosanne Cash, Rank And File, the Ramones, Ry Cooder and, weirdest of all, Eurythmics. Such compliments were sometimes repaid.

"There's only been the five of us there on the albums all the time, and we'd shunned having people sit in or any of that; mainly, I think, because we wanted to be known as a group rather than me and my guys. But this time I wanted to turn that around, to throw all the rules out at the start, and if so-and-so came over we'd let him play, and if it was no good we'd erase it.

"But what happened was, people came around and sometimes it would really perk us up and take us down another road which was interesting.

"Y'know, I didn't realise what a weird record it was until about a week before it was about to come out, and then I'm going, 'Boy! This is a little strange. We may shock them!'"

The collaboration that seems to have fired Petty's enthusiasm the most, and certainly the one that's devastated all preconceptions concerning the album, is the partnership with Eurythmics' Dave Stewart, whom Petty met at Sunset Sound Studio.

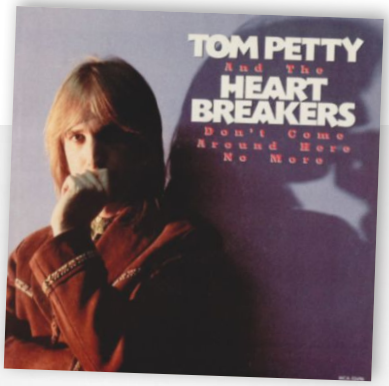
"I'd been a fan. I thought they were one of the better groups that came over that year when so many English groups came. I remember Jimmy Iovine [Petty's longtime co-producer] asking, 'Well, who's got songs?' And I said, 'These guys', because I remember playing 'Love Is A Stranger' on the piano. I learned it off TV and I was thinking, 'This is a good song no matter how you arrange it'… and I thought Annie sang great, too…"

Iovine was working on a Stevie Nicks session when Stewart called by, and during a lull in recording he called Petty down.

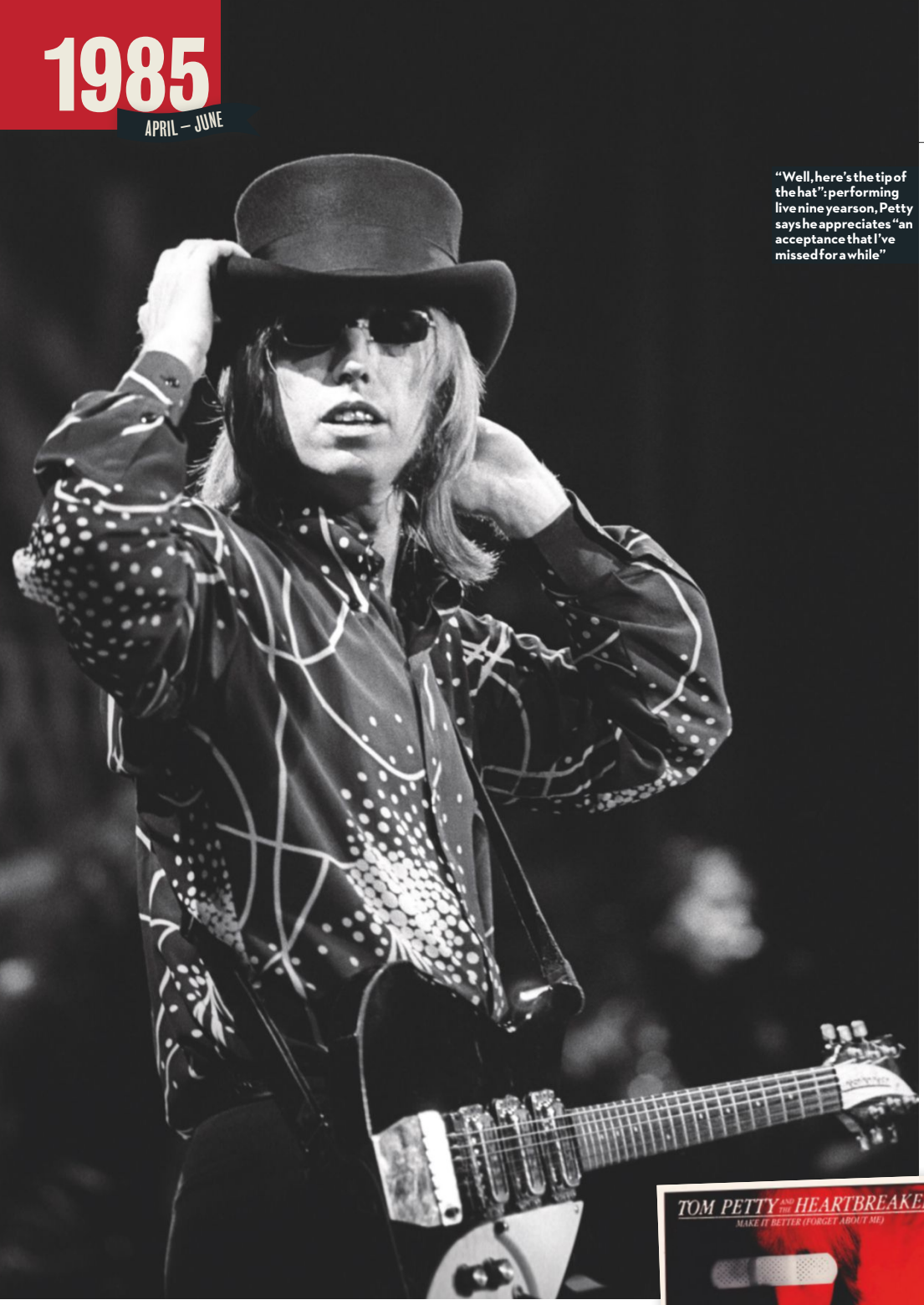
"Dave says, 'Well, why don't we write a song? That'd be something to do', which was really pretty odd for either of us. I don't know why we did it. I thought he was talking about sometime in the future, but he obviously meant right now. And he had this idea which he'd put down on cassette, so he played it to me and in about half an hour we'd written 'Don't Come Around Here No More'.

"We put down a little demo there and then went back to my house and worked on it for another three weeks of madness and… well, a lot of people think it's a strange pairing, but actually we get along fairly easily and we've become pretty good friends."

Oddest of the odd is "It Ain't Nothing To Me", a loose, jumbled, ramshackle romp through »



The Heartbreakers in 1985: (l–r) Howie Epstein, Stan Lynch, Tom Petty, Benmont Tench and Mike Campbell



"Well, here's the tip of the hat": performing live nine years on, Petty says he appreciates "an acceptance that I've missed for a while"

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

funk 'n' roll that epitomises Petty's spirit of adventure. I ask him what the hell he thinks he is?

"I'm not sure. Dave Stewart and I were in my bedroom, sitting around, watching the news with the sound off, y'know, and we had a couple of acoustics up there and it was just one summer afternoon about a year ago and… uh… he had the main riff, I think, and we were playing and the lyrics – there was something about the Space Shuttle on or something, so I was trying to picture maybe a road worker in Georgia, y'know, singing this song.

"It's sort of a cynical dance song, I guess, and I don't know, by the time we had two verses, Dave, who is very impulsive, says 'Let's go' and everybody was downstairs and we went, 'Right, stop that, do this!' Ha ha! Changed tape and then started doing the song. I think the last couple of verses were just improvised. There's only one shot on the vocals.

"In the end, I just left everything in. There's people talking all through the track. Confusion. But it was that kind of record. Stewart was good for that. Y'know, a lot of people say, 'Did working with other people weaken the band? Is the band gonna break up?' But I think, if anything, it let us all get our own things out so everyone's pretty happily back together. I really enjoyed it. We had great times and a lot of stuff didn't get on, but I'd never played with anyone in years other than the band.

"I remember once, just jamming around, we had this real strange band – me and Dave, Brian Setzer from the Stray Cats, Clem Burke playing drums and… I mean, what a band! It sounded like rubbish a lot of the time… ha ha!… but sometimes it was interesting, it was fun, y'know? It kicked us off.

"I rehearsed with the band just recently for the first time in a long time and it was really good. I came home feeling like I'd been to the analyst or something."

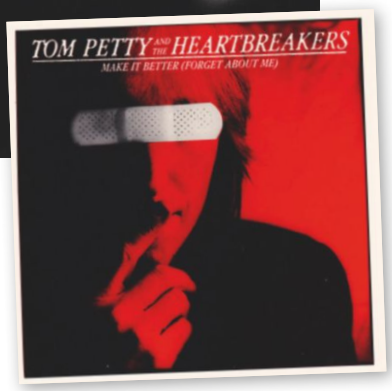
Among Petty's other collaborators on *Southern Accents* are Jack Nitzsche, who scored the title track for a 26-piece orchestra, and Robbie Robertson, who added horns to "The Best Of Everything" – as Petty puts it, another happy accident.

"Robbie asked for a song for *The King Of Comedy* movie and I played him this and he liked it and asked if I minded if he fiddled around a bit. So I said, 'No, why not?' and when I heard it I went, 'Wow! God! Yeah! I never would have heard it that way.' I think that was one of the main things that kicked me in the butt, saying, 'Look, don't close people off, because they might show you something'.

"I played it to Nick Lowe of all people, in Atlanta when he was on tour with us, and he loved it – played it over again going, 'Boy, this is just a really Southern-sounding thing, y'know', and I thought, 'Ah, perfect. One song down. Get this one.' So it's probably Nick's fault, that one."

I wonder if hanging out with so many luminaries has drawn Petty back to pop, rekindled his interest in the scene?

"Well, I listened to the Prince thing this morning and I thought that was a pretty well-done deal, pretty adventurous. There's a group called Los Lobos that I was listening to in Florida a lot that are great. And then I've got my jukebox with all the old stuff. I'm always listening to a lot of old singles – I tend to like the '50s a lot, though it's not very fashionable. I still listen to Elvis."



For all his insistence that he's a traditionalist at heart with a brain born to wander, Petty has taken to video with apparent panache. The vid for "Don't Come Around Here" features Petty, Stewart and the chaps in an *Alice In Wonderland* fantasy, an absurdly effective vehicle for the song's schizophrenia.

"My main thing was just that I wanted to do something a little different than just the fella dancing through the dry ice. We had a good time making it, a bit like being children and dressing up in old clothes and playing with doughnuts. It was just made for entertainment, really – I hate those videos that are trying to send me some message. I get so confused.

"I'm not really sure what the message is or if I wanted it anyway. So I just thought, 'Let's try to make something… uh… psychedelic', maybe an '80s version of that, just something that looks a little twisted but might shake these kids up a little bit because most people go on MTV and try to be really pretty."

There's a certain cynicism to Petty these days, a certain sting that hasn't been apparent since the young buck days of his debut album. "Spike", for example, turns the all-American outlaw on his head, takes the piss out of James Dean impersonators and yet still there's tension and affection inside the sarcasm.

"If you ain't hip enough to get the humour out of it, then I'm just not gonna worry about it, y'know?" Petty chuckles. "This was really an album that I had almost entirely to make for myself, which made it a lot harder because I really didn't anticipate any audience for it. Before, we'd stomp that attitude out, we'd think, 'No, this is negative stuff', but I wasn't trying to make this for American radio. I just tried to make it until I liked it, and that, obviously, was hell at times, but in the end I think I do like it quite a bit, so that's probably a good rule to follow from now on – make it for yourself, and when you like it, put it out.

"This album, which was pretty easy to write, turned out to be pretty hard to record for some reason – it's usually the other way round."

Ah yes, those stories…

PETTY SAYS HE doesn't know why he did it, couldn't actually pinpoint one particular pressure that propelled his fist into that wall. It was as if nine years' worth of showdowns and slow-ups, halts and hiccoughs, were suddenly mocking him there on the stair. And the boy lashed out.

Earlier that week he'd taken tapes of several songs to the record company and they'd made all the right noises. Not that they were bugging him or anything, but, well, it would be kinda nice if he could get it all wrapped up to hit the stores before Christmas. Petty agreed and launched into round-the-clock mixing, deciding what should be there, and worse, much worse, what shouldn't. He hadn't slept for days, the others were upstairs still fooling with the bare bones of songs, and he'd been alone with a cassette, despairing. It wasn't right; he wouldn't blow two years' work trying to mix it in a week.

He remembered approaching the stair, then whacking out. Nothing unusual in that. He often took it out on walls. But one of those little wooden slats caught his knuckles at an awkward angle and he could tell they were pretty well messed up.

The others joked about it. Tom Petty, some guitar hero – can't hold a pick, let alone play guitar. But within the hour they were staring at a hand swollen like Mickey Mouse's and Alan, his roadie, suggested it might not be that bad an idea to go down and see the ol' doc.

Any fool looking at the X-rays could see this was serious damage. Bones smashed, two broken clean in half. Hospitalisation. Rumours, he'd never play again. Was the man out of it or what?

"No, no – and it's better. It works again. It still feels a little sensitive and I can't lift a lot with it, but they say it's gonna come back." Petty fingers the six-inch scar that runs down his hand and I suggest he kicks walls from now on.

"Yeah, yeah. I don't hit walls any more. It took a lot of my temper back, I can tell you, but it made it a much better album, because when I got out of hospital, after the operation, I could hear really clearly.

"Y'know, I'm intensely pleased that this record was understood, because I was all prepared to take it on the chin. This has been a very pleasurable experience, putting this album out. It's nice because it's such a good group and it's finally getting a little bit of… well, here's the tip of the hat. We've endured nine years of this madness, and at times I've felt, 'Wow! We didn't get any credit for that and we did it before this guy did', y'know? And so the nice thing is just to see an acceptance that I've missed for a while.

"I think now I'd just like to go and see the work get better and, hopefully, break some ground. That's what I'm interested in doing now, breaking some ground in my own little area. Y'know, I've got a little bit bored of being put in this club all the time of Bruces, Bobs, Cougars and the million that came after us. I really don't wanna be in the club, and now I've staked out a little of our ground, hopefully.

"You just can't get rid of us. We're here whether you like it or not. We'll just keep coming back."

Petty's right. The future ain't what it used to be. It's brighter.

Steve Sutherland ●

ALBUMS REVIEW 1985

A potent hybrid

MM APR 4 Petty stretches for influences beyond the heartland on album six.

Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers
Southern Accents MCA

Whatever Tom Petty means to you – McGuinn pastiches, sun-bleached blondes and cheekbones, car cassettes and highway heaven or absolute American AOR – *Southern Accents* will confound as much as confirm your anticipations. Whether by fortuitous fluke or incredible inspiration, Petty has confronted his reputation, taken stock, taken it apart and gone for something extraordinarily *new*.

Southern Accents has everything anyone could have expected – it's like an archive of Americana, using the past, polishing it into a gleaming present and parading itself as something vitally contemporary.

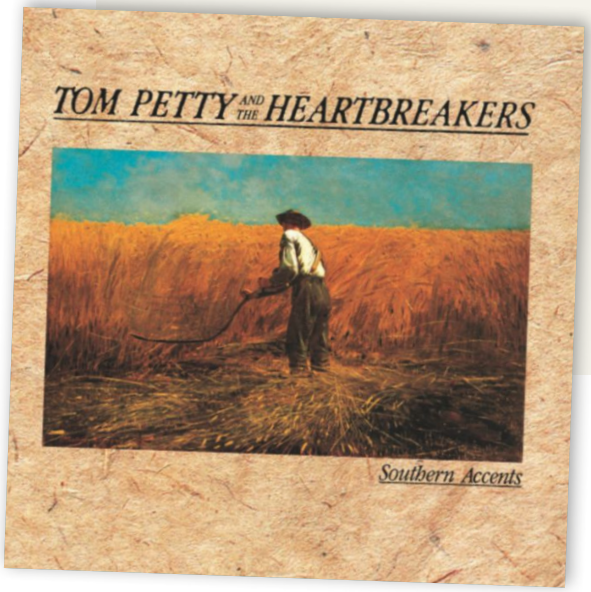
"Rebels" and the title track are burdened with Robbie Robertson's sense of history, yesterday's events informing today's habits. "The Best Of Everything" aches with Springsteen's humanity, a melodramatic ballad over bare piano that, through sheer emotional detail ("*The bad nights take forever and the good nights don't ever seem to last*") avoids sentimentality.

"It Ain't Nothin'" is a belligerent, playful shot of sexual obsession

All this is what we've come to consider Petty's forte, that blistering croak bordering on caricature investing cliche with a thrilling intensity. But *Southern Accents* takes the ingredients and turns them around, thanks largely to Eurythmic Dave Stewart, whose co-compositions – "It Ain't Nothin' To Me", "Don't Come Around Here No More" and "Make It Better' (Forget About Me)" – are a fresh, exuberantly potent hybrid of new technology and old instincts.

"Don't Come Around Here", a candidate for single of the year so far, marries strings and choirs to Petty's petulant sass in an unprecedented and pushy manner, while "It Ain't Nothin'" bumps and grinds along brisk blasts of brass, the vocal phasing out into the ozone while a roughshod chant punctures the fabric of the song's ramshackle groove. It's horny and funky, worldly-wise and yet exhilaratingly free of convention, a belligerent, playful shot of sexual obsession.

At times, the experimentation is superfluous – the spiralling trumpet on "Rebel" is never fully integrated into the texture, an appendage rather than a component. But at his best, Petty's so sleek and minimal it's absurd no one's been here before. "Mary's New Car", for instance, cruises along a breeze of a riff, Petty unashamedly pursuing the old chassis/screwing equation, effortlessly. There's so *little* here, it sounds so natural; it's intoxicating, a design streamlined as near to perfect performance as possible. Against all the odds, *Southern Accents* is the sound of the modern world, aware and alive. Use it. *Steve Sutherland*



"Music with a capital 'M'"

The prolific HÜSKER DÜ have escaped the strictures of hardcore, to make truly remarkable music. "There's nothing incredibly new about it," says BOB MOULD. "We're just doing what we do the best we can."

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

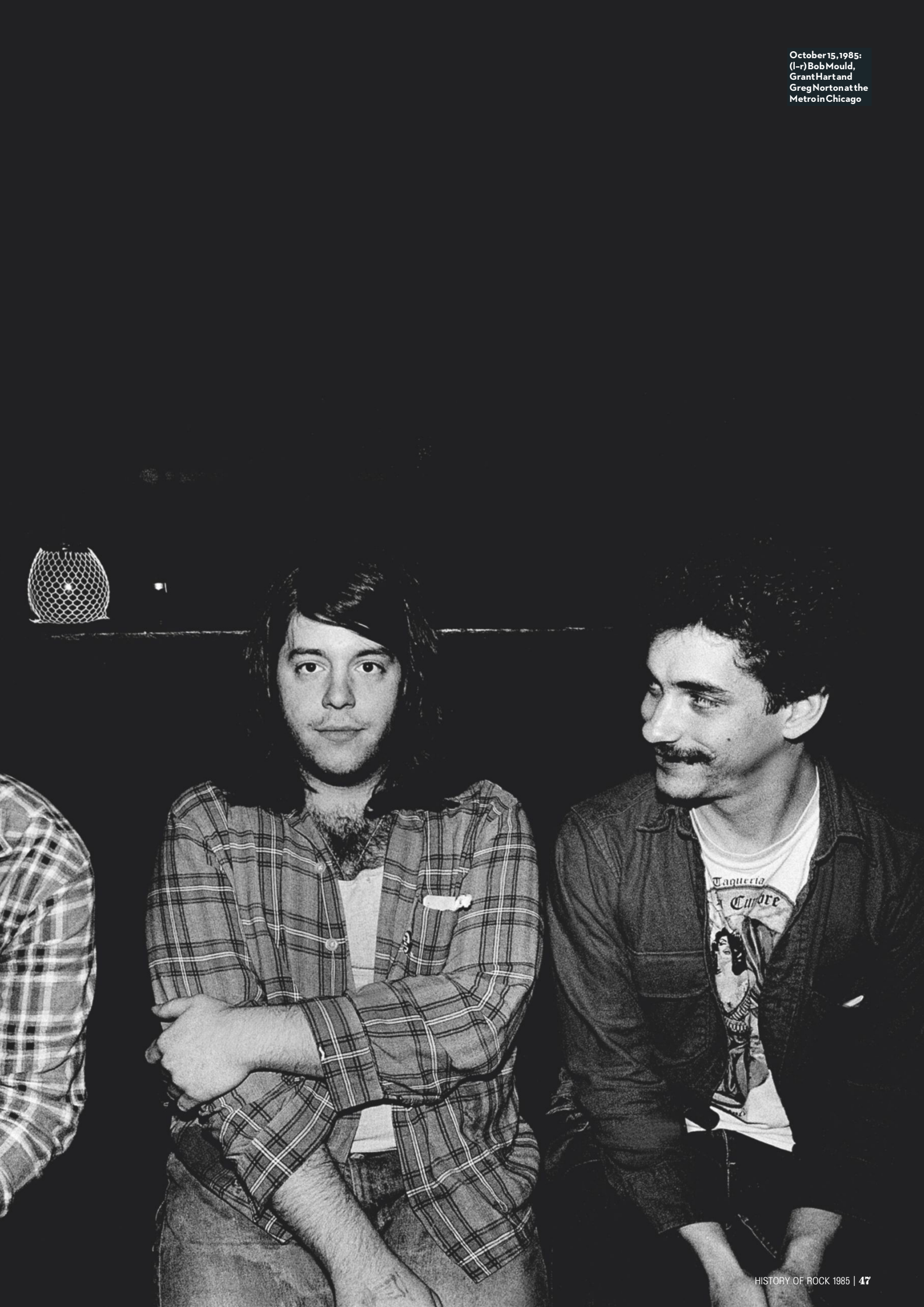
— NME JUNE 8 —

IN ONE OF her more perceptive *Time Out* columns recently, Julie Burchill took a hefty sideswipe at the video popsters' incessant flirtation with outsiderdom – all that "look at me, no one understands me" bullshit that still accompanies the high cheekbones and doe-eyed aquillinity – and came to the conclusion that to be truly revolutionary and original these days, a band would have to be old, ugly and visually unsaleable. An audio band rather than a video band. Hüsker Dü may well be the band of which she wrote.

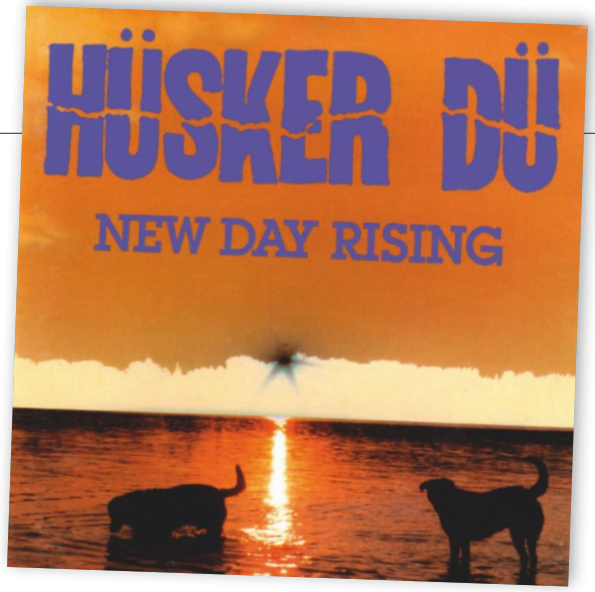
Not that they're that old – no older than Madonna, I'd imagine – or that ugly, or even that unsaleable (in the current resurgence of American rock, all things are possible); it's simply that they don't seem to give a damn, and never have done. Almost as if they realised long ago they couldn't challenge the pin-up boys of the pop world, and so set about working in a different arena.

Bob Mould – guitarist, singer and songwriter – is soft-spoken, short-haired, paunchy, and wears an anorak over a sweatshirt bearing the legend "American Wrestling Association". He looks like he might indulge himself – serious wrestling in America is a noble sport; but no, he likes to watch it on TV (Bob watches a lot of TV), and the real showbiz kind, at that. Bob says it's the modern-day equivalent of Shakespeare, the only place the common man can get a full-blown morality play, with a bit of gymnastics thrown in for good measure. It's one of the few subjects on which Bob gets mildly animated. His greatest desire, while in Britain, is not to see St Paul's, the Tower or Big Ben, but to see Big Daddy, a monument among men.

Grant Hart – drummer, singer and songwriter – is swarthy, paunchy, with shoulder-length hair that covers his face like a Hawkwind helmet when he's drumming, and he wears white Hüsker boots with half-size laces, no socks, a garage T-shirt and a rumpled paisley jacket. He's rather more rowdy than »



October 15, 1985: (l–r) Bob Mould, Grant Hart and Greg Norton at the Metro in Chicago



Bob, given to one-line interjections, sometimes accompanied by a cynical snort. Strangely enough, Grant's songs have a buoyancy, a wistful pop lyricism that provides many of the group's most memorable – hummable – moments.

Greg Norton – bassist – writes no songs, sings no songs, says few words, but is the snappiest dresser of the three. He also has a magnificent handlebar moustache, a veritable Salvador Dalí of an upper lip. Apart from this, he seems quite sensible.

On stage, he leaps higher than anyone since Pete Townshend in his heyday, which is just as well, since Bob's couch-potato style and low-slung guitar (at the Camden Palace, there was some difficulty in finding a guitar strap long enough for Bob) militate against excessive gymnastic displays. Together, they look like the rock'n'roll equivalent of the Pontypool front row.

With typical candour, Bob cites as reasons for their formation "boredom. And that we liked music, too. Time to kill." The usual punk apprenticeship, in other words. In those days – late '78, early '79 – Hüsker Dü were pretty much in the hardcore mainstream, such as it was.

"It was real fast, aggressive stuff at the beginning," says Bob. "We were 17, 18 years old then, so I guess we were letting off some steam."

If I were to call Bob a master of understatement, I would be being niggardly in my description. Their earliest recorded document, *Land Speed Record*, is not so much fast and aggressive as a blur of noise, a non-stop hardcore thrash in which songs seem to melt into each other to become one long scream of disaffection. A barrage, pure and simple; and to be honest, hardly worth listening to in the light of what was to follow.

"Those songs were two years old when they were recorded, and recording them live with a real limited budget – $350 – they couldn't have gone any further from where they were. The best thing to do was put 'em down and move on."

What did the hardcore audience think of guys looking like you?

"They were into it. For a while. As long as it sounded like something that was within their rules. We get shunned by them now…

"To me, hardcore music, whether it was hardcore jazz, or hardcore industrial, or hardcore rock'n'roll, was no rules involved – you could do anything you wanted to; it was the intensity you put it across with that made it what it was. The hardcore punk thing got to have a lot of rules, and when we stopped being associated with those rules – or, as they would like to think, 'following' those rules – we were immediately on the out.

"You grow up, you change your perspective. You're not always 18 years old, drunk, with a mohawk, driving around screaming and hollering about anarchy – you don't do that all your life."

Eventually, after another simple thrash LP, *Everything Falls Apart*, they found a home at SST Records. Their first record for the label was a seven-track 12-inch called "Metal Circus", which opened with their definitive statement of being out of alignment with their former audience.

I say "former" audience, but doesn't SST, home of hardcore, typecast them, set them in the same mould? Bob disagrees.

"I think what Black Flag's doing is totally different from what The Minutemen are doing, which is completely different from… All the bands have a different style; I think the only thing that might be in common is just the ideology, the approach to how to make music available, as far as how tours are set up and how promotion is done. That's pretty much the only common thread I can see.

"The Meat Puppets are out of Phoenix, we're out of Minneapolis, all the other bands are out of LA, so it's completely different musical environments. LA is a very plastic music town, whereas Minneapolis is more of a grassroots bar scene. In LA, Hollywood, there's all the heavy metal clubs and all that, and bands are killing each other to get signed to major labels. We don't do that in Minneapolis. We just play."

From a past of hardcore bamalam, of simple, ultra-fast Ramoning, Hüsker Dü have somehow fashioned a future of seemingly limitless possibilities. There's been a host of tricks turned with the basic guitar, bass, drums format since Chuck and Bo laid down the groundwork some three decades ago. Most have relied on a series of set structural devices, and an internal homogeneity: one thinks of The Sex Pistols (whose importance was, admittedly, mainly gestural) and their distinctly unrevolutionary use of hard rock guitar with a rhythm section.

The thing which sets Hüsker Dü apart, the core of their uniqueness, is the way they mix those same structural devices in ways that shouldn't work, combining elements of several genres in one song.

The classic Hüsker Dü sound, as crystallised on "Metal Circus", is based on thunderbuck, hiccuping drums (a bit like Buzzcocks' John Maher, only more to the point) behind a bass that manages to be both solid and swallowtail-melodic at one, able to carry the tune if necessary, like REM's Mike Mills; over this are poured carillons of distorted guitar, with shouted vocals rasping hoarsely from deep in the mix.

As that description stands, it could fit a thousand bands since 1977; Hüsker Dü's innovation, on their best material, is to combine this fearsome punk-metal attack with honeyed vocal harmonies and the kind of pretty tunes that just don't fit the style. Or didn't. At times they can seem like Motörhead, only musical.

Don't underestimate the power of one man and his guitar, either. Bob Mould, like Wilko Johnson and Pete Townshend, can combine both lead and rhythm lines in one, or double up his rhythm lines, but unlike them he does it at a furious level of distortion. The result is a sound that splinters as it chimes, with ringing harmonics and overtones showering over the layered chords, a slant on the guitar/bass/drums format that owes more to the likes of Wire's *Pink Flag* than to The Clash.

At their only British gig so far – a one-off freebie at the Camden Palace, filmed for the *Live In London* TV series – the strange mix of head-on collision noise and oddly tuneful harmonies seemed more akin to The Jesus And Mary Chain than their co-compatriots in the new American rock: no deferential, studied aping of an older genre here.

HÜSKER DÜ ARE hot-wired, straight off the street, so to speak. The essence of the sound is bracing, scouring, a healthy mouthful of Domestos forced down the tender throat of pop. If, as seems to be the case, we're in the middle of a rock'n'roll fightback against the soothing pop placebo, then Hüsker Dü are something of a tactical first strike, a smart bomb which takes out the life force but leaves the structures intact and available for cannibalism.

Zen Arcade, the 23-track double album which came out last year, is like a diary of disaffection, often inchoate and inarticulate, but always heartfelt; much of the music, both here and on the more recent *New Day Rising*, is like an atavistic shriek, an ancestral folk memory, primal yet bearing traces of form and order in its tunes. "Hüsker Dü" is Swedish for "do you remember?". Remember what?

> "The hardcore punk thing got to have a lot of rules"

Hüsker Dü may be rough-hewn and crude (though not as crude as they first appear), but at least they try to penetrate to the heart. Indeed, they have to be that tough and grating to break through the hardened arteries. They don't do many love songs, pure and simple, but when they do (eg, "The Girl Who Lives On Heaven Hill"), they're not exactly tender, but verge on the euphoric.

"It's not that I don't feel love or have love or make love or do love, it's just one of those things that has been overused in popular music and has become trivialised," acknowledges Bob.

"Ever since the word 'baby' was introduced into a love song – I mean, can you see this grown man making love to a two-year-old girl? Then you can tell when groups get mature, because it's 'girl' – '*Hey, girl!*' – then when you're Neil Diamond it's, '*Girl, you'll be a woman soon*', then it's like, '*C'mon, grandma, let's roll in the hay!*'

"It's not that love isn't a wonderful thing, it's just that there's enough people talking about it in songs that don't mean it."

Nor do they do overt political songs, the usual alternative to love songs (we'll ignore the sword-and-sorcery crew, thank you very much). It's not that they don't have opinions or deeply felt beliefs, it's just that they don't want to use the stage as a soapbox, preferring instead to make private donations to local environmental causes, like a group who're doing a study on the water table in Minnesota.

So do they believe rock'n'roll is inextricably linked with real life?

"Oh yeah, I think good rock'n'roll is. Rock music isn't. Rock music is completely based in fantasy. Good rock'n'roll like The Who or The Byrds, is based in down-to-earth business, in the dirty, lowdown, shit-in-your-pants stuff that happens every day. There's a difference, in my mind anyway."

So would you view each album as a diary?

"Definitely. They're like a documentary of where we're at at that period. It's hard to explain what goes into an album: we have the songs written, but once we get into the studio, that's where it happens. We don't have concrete ideas of what should happen; things gel as we're in there, and at that point they become notes of where we were at story-wise that month.

"People always say, 'Why don't you play the old songs?' After a while a song may lose its meaning to you: it may have been a specific event that isn't relevant to your life any more."

Hence the change from the dark introspection of *Zen Arcade* to the more positive, outgoing *New Day Rising*. The former's cover – a coloured-in xerox depicting the three grey-shaded Hüskers wandering through a junkyard of brightly hued wrecked cars – serves notice of the sounds inside; the scraps of pessimism and disillusionment tricked out in all manner of musical finery, verging in places on the psychedelic.

Zen Arcade is one of the strangest, most comprehensive LPs of recent years; not the happiest, perhaps, but then who needs happiness? Having stretched out over four sides and tried out other avenues, they returned to a more mainstream format with the triumphant *New Day Rising*.

What happened in-between?

"It was just a reaction to *Zen Arcade*," says Bob. "*Zen Arcade* was longer, darker, moodier, it went through a lot of different changes – there were the little segues on piano and guitars, etc. With *New Day Rising* we just said to hell with that, let's strip it back down and do what we were doing. It was like starting over again.

"That's not to say there won't be another *Zen Arcade* – there may well be. It's really easy to make that kind of record."

"It's really easy," adds Grant, "to get into a rut where you've got to one-up yourself all the time, too: oh, the last album had tympani, so this one has to have harp…"

But don't you find the guitar/bass/drums lineup limiting?

"Not for this band," says Bob. "The function of this band is to be guitar, bass, drums and vocals. Anything beyond that, in theory, is not really the band. We don't have synthesizers off to the side, or roll on the grand piano and stuff, which was what *Zen Arcade* was leaning towards. Fortunately, we got a hold of ourselves and brought it back to reality, started realising the context in which we performed.

"If a song calls for something, then we'll get it. The record we're working on now, there isn't even an acoustic guitar. The songs are strong enough that we didn't need to fuck around with the shit this time.

"It's sort of in the same vein as *New Day Rising* – whichever direction – and it's more vocal-oriented, as opposed to a wall of sound. It's a cleaner production: we produced it ourselves, as opposed to having Spot from SST come in and do it, so it does sound a lot better."

The vocals on *New Day Rising* were largely indecipherable…

"Thank you, Spot," Grant sneers sardonically.

"We like masking it a little bit," Bob explains. "I think sometimes just the order of consonants and sibilants is as important as the words themselves. Those songs are more atmospheric than anthemic. There's a difference: you can write the songs with the chorus everyone'll remember, and then you can write the ones nobody really knows the words to and can phase in and out of as they wish. Like 'Perfect Example', the words are real cloudy, it's the feeling that comes across more."

> "Dreams tell you things you might not want to hear"

That song's particularly dream-like. Do you have an interest in dreams?

"Oh yeah. Dreams are weird," says Bob. "If you sleep with the TV on, you have more dreams, because you're getting aural suggestions. I put on the 24 hour news, and I have just the craziest dreams – you hear them talking, and it'll trigger something in your subconscious that'll get you dreaming you're in Africa, or whatever.

"I think dreams are just messages from your subconscious, telling you things you might not want to hear about, telling you realities that are coming in your life. It's your little guy on your shoulder, y'know, the voices in your head that you don't listen to because you're too busy."

Like musical repo men, Hüsker Dü are in the process of reclaiming discontinued or disgraced threads of rock's rich tapestry and weaving strange new garments – unlike most of the other new American bands engaged in archaeological work, who seem instead to be operating some kind of invisible mending service.

It's this oddness that gives them their peculiar intensity. Individual elements of their sound are recognisable, but there's no single neat little compartment you could shoe-horn them into, like 'country rock' or 'psychedelia'. Not for them the structures of a Paisley Underground…

"It's all a buncha hooey!" claims Grant, with customary frankness. "There's a lot of people that think they can slap on a paisley shirt and a pair of Roger McGuinn sunglasses and take acid and be psychedelic."

"There's a lot of that kind of stuff," agrees Bob. "A lot of talking in real abstract terms and being real surreal all the time… playing in a band and being fulla shit…"

By the same token, the resurgence of interest in older musics receives short shrift, too.

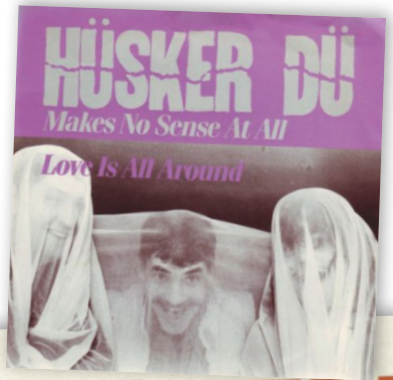
"People lacking the imagination to draw from the future draw from the past," says Grant, a trifle harshly perhaps.

Bob is somewhat more reasonable. "But the people who draw from the future are people who're completely into synthesizers: oh, I'm using the technology of today to create the sounds of tomorrow – a very unnatural thing. What we're doing, and what most of the bands are doing, is not that new. Especially what we're doing – there's nothing incredibly new about it. We're not, like, The New Age. We're just doing what we do the best we can.

"There's some elements of change in the way we approach the topics, or weave in and out of topics – but again, I don't think that's anything new. It's just a change from what's going on, to some degree."

Is what you do Art, with a capital A, or something less precious than that?

"It's Music, with a capital M. With all capital letters." *Andy Gill* •



THE THRASH ÆSTHETIC

"All pop is political"

"To me, pop and the whole notion of pleasure, sex, entertainment and leisure is political," says SCRITTI POLITTI's GREEN GARTSIDE. "So Dead Or Alive with their swirling clothes have as much political resonance as Billy Bragg." Charming as he is, Gartside's work doesn't please everyone.

— NME JUNE 1 —

THE TWO SINGERS, a tall fresh-faced Welshman and a soft-spoken bleary-eyed Mancunian, felt trapped. Try as he might to plot a path out of the complexities of art, language, politics and even music – all abiding concerns of his group Scritti Politti – the Welshman always ended up fronting an improvised racket. He wanted to break down the ideological barriers, his self-imposed stasis.

Joy Division, the Mancunian's group, had reached a ferocious, inexorable peak and for him further elevation seemed impossible. Long into the night they sat talking on the stage of an empty Electric Ballroom, feeling depressed and distanced – unable to offer solace for each other's problems. No resolutions or solutions came out of their discussion, just a mutual confirmation of boredom and restlessness. The two, Ian Curtis and Green Gartside, never met again. Within a week, Curtis was dead.

Soon after, Gartside returned to Wales to recover from illness and reconsider his strategy, as a post-Marxist agnostic materialist, in the pop marketplace.

Thus encumbered, he naturally found himself with a bit of a reputation.

"I think that's a lot of bollocks actually, the reputation. I learned a bit too late how you get reputations. For a while I did try to deny my interests, but I can't deny them, they are as with me as any other formal experiences would inform anyone else's writing.

"It's very much part and parcel of how you look at the world. I don't think you can be impressed by Marx or Freud and then forget the whole concept of class or conscience, never let them impinge on your perspective. It will sometimes surface – for better or worse, I might add." »

LAURA LEVINE / GETTY

Scritti Politti mainstay Green Gartside in 1983: "I don't think you can be impressed by Marx or Freud and then forget the whole concept of class or conscience"

Gartside with Americans Fred Maher (left) and David Gamson, the core musicians on *Cupid & Psyche 85*

ALAMY

And surface it did, this concern with the power of language, in songs like "Jacques Derrida" and the new sweetened sound on the *Songs To Remember* LP using soul inspiration, songs of faith, "to sing about faithlessness".

Too often it seemed Gartside was commenting on the pop process at the expense of his own intuition. Eighteen months after *Songs To Remember* came "Wood Beez" a collaboration with Arif Mardin in which he told us "*I pray like Aretha Franklin*". Does he really?

"Do me a favour! It's very complicated, it's the whole question of what pop is; its relationship to language, power and politics. It's also a question of music's transgression and abuse of some of the rules of language. Aretha was singing what are arguably inane pop songs and had left her gospel roots. But she sang them with a fervour, a passion, though I hate to use that word because it's been hideously tarred in recent usage. To a committed materialist whose interest had come round to language again – perhaps because of a bankruptcy in Marxism to deal with ideology or any artistic community – hearing her was as near to a hymn or a prayer as I could get.

"Obviously I couldn't make that point in a three-minute pop song. All I could do was allude to it and hope that someone like you would happen along me and say that's a stupid fuckin' lyric."

When I meet Gartside I'm pleasantly surprised to find him warm, expressive and jocular. I had suspicions that a cool, evasive New Age pop businessman had been born out of his past confusions. But for better or for worse, to use a recurring Gartside phrase, once the beer flows, the old semiotics keep surfacing. And when they do, he falters and corrects himself, going into long convoluted explanations. Rude and childish as it may have been, I couldn't help myself from giggling at such loquacity – it's only pop'n'roll after all.

"I certainly don't subscribe to the view that pop music is any more one-dimensional than any other form of production. All pop is political. I hate the critical attitude that draws boundaries and says this here is political because it's waving a flag and it's saying this."

"To me, pop and the whole notion of pleasure, sex, entertainment and leisure is political. So Dead Or Alive with their swirling clothes and all the rest of it have as much political resonance as Billy Bragg. Until that's accepted, we've got a long way to go. They were making political pop 30 years ago f'rchrissake, and no one called it political then."

> "I have these convoluted politics that no one can figure out"

One for the money

OK, SO THERE'S a new album of political pop by Scritti Politti called *Cupid And Psyche*. It's the first with new members Dave Gamson and Fred Maher, young New Yorkers in the process of relocating in London, and the first since *Songs To Remember* some two-and-a-half years ago.

Out of nine tracks there are three pearls – three of the finest pop songs you'll hear all year – while the rest is form held over content, a potpourri of confection stuffed into solid studio dance rhythms. When on form, on the superlative "Lover To Fall", Scritti swing free and easy, matching a dazzling and dynamic beatbox-inspired rhythm to classy lyrical panache – the perfect combination of rhythm and reason to obtain the "abuse of language" Green craves.

Still, the materialist Marxist in me isn't so easily persuaded. Four previously available singles is chancing it a bit.

"I think that's fair."

With the pound's value, the price of records, unemployment, Aids…

"It's a reflection of a year's work."

But it's work you've already been paid for and now you're trying to increase the sales of an LP with singles that have already been handsome earners.

"That wouldn't worry me in going to buy an LP. People have the choice, they needn't buy it if they think it's unfair. Perhaps I'll suffer as a result."

Giving the listener value isn't a priority, then?

"I'm not sure that it isn't value, those sort of arguments were never ones I was particularly swayed by. If you've already got four tracks and don't feel like shelling out for the remaining five, then borrow it off someone else who has it and tape it. I don't know."

It's a subversive's excuse and I remain unconvinced. But the bulk of the record – a feasible sound not developed or prodded enough?

"The work went into getting the sound, not as an end in itself, but it's all part of learning as you go. It was a socially made record, with Dave and Fred contributing as much as me. I do like discipline and I don't like being on my own. We're learning in public, testing each other out, our relationship and how far we can take it into music.

"The thing about the record is that it's a collection of songs quite independent from the ways in which they're presented. The fact that to you there is a homogeneity to the way they're presented is something we're quite interested in fucking with when the time is right."

People think I'm the life of the party…

THE SLY, VOLUPTUOUS "The Word Girl" is proving itself to be more than soft skank ("*How your flesh and blood became the word*," sings Green – transubstantiation in post-Marxist agnostic pop!) and it's also edging up the charts. How does he deal with the pop circus image play?

"I'm uncomfortable with that whole thing. I'm unable to work out its significance, to work out how much it really matters. But it would seem

a sillier thing by far to try and deny it or wish not to be a part of it.

"I find it hard to imagine that you could have a pop music that develops people's attention span or literacy. God forbid that you should have a pop music that does try to do that… in some ways. By the same token, I don't think the pop music I make damages people's attention span or literacy."

While finding the new socialist broad church of pop "positively good", he doesn't get asked for much participation in benefits, cause championing and the like.

"I have these tortuously convoluted politics that no one can fathom out. I also make inane pop records that don't begin – how is it? – '*You don't have to take this crap*'."

Maybe two LPs' worth of love songs has given people a false impression?

"I can see how that looks, possibly how that is. It's a question of what you decide to address yourself to, and I've had a few quite unproductive run-ins trying to write overtly… No, 'overtly' is the wrong word – literally political songs, and they don't work well.

"My kind of politics is distinct from someone like Jerry Dammers; I couldn't write a 'Free Nelson Mandela'. Whereas I feel upset about it, my immediate reaction after years of thinking about it isn't righteous indignation. It's a kind of thinking about all the political mechanisms that operate to keep that thing happening.

"I don't immediately think – the terrible suffering of this man in prison. Dammers' response is a bit like the response of the *Morning Star* calling on the South African government or the Tories to do this or that. My response is to be reminded of all the mechanisms by which power is held internationally. It's a problem for us both, but it looks a bigger problem for me at the moment."

A pity if this all makes Green sound a tortured soul, as he's really a good lad. We continue an exchange of arguments and interests for hours after the interview, joined by Dave and Fred in a Mexican restaurant. Gartside seems to have an evangelical zeal for the rewriting of critical language. Starting to feel out of my depth, I wonder if it's really that important.

"I don't think anyone is ever out of their depth, it's the whole myth of adulthood. I remember when I was young thinking adults must have the key to some special knowledge. Well here I am at 29 finding out it's all bullshit."

Perhaps he'd like to become a critic or investigate music from cultures where tribal and spiritual rites overtake the function of language.

"Oh, but I like dealing with language. I've no wish to ignore it."

The taxi came to rest outside the singer's rented flat in Islington. He'd done it again, he thought, filled another interview with philosophical waxings. Why couldn't he just answer the questions without tying the verbal knots? It must have been the lager, he decided.

"I guess I fucked up that interview," he said to the journalist.

"Not at all, only a critic can fuck up in an interview, and you're not one of those," replied the journalist. At least not yet, he thought, not yet. *Gavin Martin* •

Hollow and artificial

NME JUNE 15 Scritti's glossy, postmodern second deconstructed.

Scritti Politti Cupid & Psyche 85 VIRGIN

A bunch of words such as can be found on the new Scritti Politti album: heart, her, girl, baby, word, reason, love, boy, hurt, sugar, heaven, sweet, tenderness, true. All mean just as much (or just as little) as they've always meant in pop music. Green Gartside may well be one of pop music's most intelligent and thoughtful characters, but there is a sense in which he lets his head run away with his heart. His concern with the way we order our ordering of experience means his attention centres more on the way phenomena are presented to us, and the values we allot to those representations, than on the phenomena themselves.

Thus, in his pop music, he plays with the language of the medium, both verbal and musical, in a way which implicitly criticises the way the language was used originally. Such is the implication of the inverted commas in "The 'Sweetest' Girl", for instance.

The effect of this, deliberately or accidentally, has been the withering away of pop vocabulary. We may still use the same terms, but they no longer have the same power: instead of expressing emotions, they become a shorthand for them, a series of signals to which the consumer is expected to respond.

Unfortunately, when this kind of post-modernist dissection is applied to affairs of the heart, it can't help but come across hollow and artificial, because it's getting further removed from the business of actually moving, of authentic emotional experience. Instead of dealing with a girl, directly, Green is forced to deal with The Word Girl.

"Green's pop plays with the language of the medium, verbal and musical"

It's a quandary, maybe even something of a crisis: either you try and use the original, first-hand language, in which case you're forced into irony, or you stand back and witter on about the language. Both ways, you're getting further from the actual experience.

My personal predilection is for music which articulates more authentic, raw emotions and experience than are traversed here. There is a directness about gospel, blues, and Cajun musics which is sometimes shocking: the first time I heard Bessie Smith, for instance, I was physically sick. That could never happen in Green's pastel pop world, for there appear to be no Stones In His Passway.

Similarly, the effusions of Bo Diddley, Howlin' Wolf and Captain Beefheart seem more honest, trustworthy representations of male sexuality than Green's horrid Violet Elizabeth Bott vocalisings and Green and David Gamson's synthetic musical stylings, a confection which is, in a pure sense, infantile, pre-sexual, a deceit of denial.

All the correct percussive noises are made, every little bit of spare space filled with banging, rattling and tapping noises, courtesy former Material-ist Fred Maher; it might even be a form of tinkly-bonk music, except that it affects the tinkle without getting down to bonking. And despite the use of possibly unusual textural elements like glockenspiel and steel pan sounds, they're not put together in a way that shoots even a sideway glance away from the dull, drab, sickly pop of the past few years.

I suppose it's unfortunate that Green appears to have latched on to black pop music just as it entered its most sterile, formalist phase with the distinctly snooze-worthy hip hop and now go-go muzak.

The back cover of *Cupid & Psyche 85* features a piece of meat draped in muslin, held by three star studs and a butterfly. How inappropriate. Might I suggest instead a great big melting chocolate heart reclining on a bed of pastel-pink satinette. Keep the butterfly if you wish, and get the art director of *Jackie* to lay it out.

The LP contains the last four singles plus five other tracks which plough pretty much the same furrow, so those among you who lapped up the 45s will doubtless find solace in similarity here. *Andy Gill*

ALBUMS REVIEW 1985

"The banshee department"

John Peel listener ROBERT PLANT returns. Has enough water flowed under the bridge to discuss the Zeppelin legend, Guana Batz and the occult pursuits of Jimmy Page? Apparently it has. "It's not my job to say the guy plays cricket..."

— NME JUNE 8 —

IF KEITH RICHARDS' guitar playing is, as has been described, the sound of "grinding sexual blockage", then Robert Plant's bloozewail vocalese equates with a rabid mongoose sinking its teeth into a hitherto coiled and recumbent trouser-snake.

Such was my impression when, back in the Jurassic Era, my tender lobes were first belaboured by that white-hot wigged-out mutha-stompa known only as Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love".

And, by a strange coincidence, my first impression of the man-in-the-flesh-in-the-very-same-room is that a horse should be so lucky. Not even strides of such summery bagginess as could comfortably accommodate a whole boatload of Vikings can blur the contours of what might come in very handy should the roses ever need watering.

But let us not mock the stereotype of a huge and pea-brained sock-rocker floundering out of the primeval morass with a view to bending the ears of more advanced species. Let us instead consider that rare beast, the dinosaur that evolved...

BRIAN RASIC / GETTY

"I ONCE SPENT AN evening in a Puerto Rican nightclub in Spanish Harlem, and I just sat there all night and enjoyed all those very, very sharp people who'd taken so much pride in themselves and the fact that it was Friday night. Everything about them – their movements, their clothes, their »

"I'm dogged by the remains of the last 18 years of my life": Robert Plant in 1985

profiles, their gestures – everything was, like, splendid. It wasn't glossy and it wasn't trashy or kitsch.

"It was so for real it was great. And I realised I wanted my music to be like that: sharp, mildly aggressive, something that you might stand back from and squint your eyes at and wonder about. But not so uncomfortable that you can't hold its hand occasionally."

Such a pristinely romantic vision of the power of music would not issue from the lips of, say, Mick Jagger these days. Nor would the Mighty Marf, as evinced by that dismal *She's The Boss* LP, makes so bold as to record an EP of covers of such as Phil Phillips & The Twilights' 1959 swamp-pop hit "Sea Of Love", or indeed Roy Brown's pioneering late-'40s proto-rocker "Rockin' At Midnight".

But that's what Robert Plant did last year under the banner of The Honeydrippers. And even now a new album of Plant-music hits the shops: *Shaken 'N' Stirred*, despite the gung-ho diplodorkishness of its title, considerably betters its two predecessors *Pictures At Eleven* and *The Principle Of Moments*.

A curious record, it mixes and matches ideas with variable results. At worst it approaches that fuzak of hyperthyroid drumming and confused chord changes so rightly loathed when played by the likes of Billy Cobham back in the early '70s. But outweighing those delinquent displays of unfocused virtuosity, Plant's excursions into the head-rock atmosphere of such as Talking Heads and The Police develop some of Led Zeppelin's best latterday moments like "Kashmir" and "Fool In The Rain".

Furthermore, the joyous ferocity of old Sun records, a touchstone for Plant throughout his career, echoes on his new single "Pink And Black", where Elvis' cat-clothes get the agony/ecstasy refurbishment to intriguing effect. Nor is *Shaken 'N' Stirred* without humour: vocal and instrumental pranks abound, whereas the guffaws in Led Zep's 12-year canon were few and far between.

Indeed, if an equivalent exists to this LP in the post-punk genre, it is David Sylvian's *Brilliant Trees*. So howcum the Most Beautiful Men in the World also have some of the weirdest tunes?

"THE PLAN IS to incorporate the beginnings of what I hope The Honeydrippers will turn out to be, and that is a mild poke at the '40s and '50s, using stuff like horn sections and getting rid of the kitsch and the twee as we go along.

"I'm dogged by the remains of the last 18 years of my life, and there's an element who want me to turn into a cabaret act 30 years before I intend to. So I thought we could revert it to where we got it from in the first place, which is really a Little Richard thing, and then take it back a stage further to where Little Richard got his style, from Wynonie Harris and Louis Jordan. It takes the onus off the banshee department, you know."

> "Jimmy's primarily a musician; I motivate, point my finger"

Personally I still hear more banshee than "Bloodshot Eyes" or "Caldonia" in *Shaken 'N' Stirred*, but I suspect this open, amusing, thoughtful and articulate bloke is capable of any unlikely cross breeding that takes his fancy. For he ain't in it for the money – he doesn't really need any more, as he readily admits. He's in it for the pleasure.

Robert Plant is a capital-F Fan. At 37 his knowledge and enthusiasm for pop ranges wide and bang up to date. I had fun talking to him.

"Some people, when they have days off, bury themselves in Kafka or go and watch Crystal Palace. When I've got time off, I usually fall back into the latest Speciality releases through Ace Records. If anybody asked me what I did when I wasn't writing fresh stuff and moving away from that old role, if you like, it would be to get back into jump blues."

When did you first get into it?

"When I was about 14 to 15. The only way of listening to records then was Radio Luxembourg, somebody else's collection or American Forces Network. The quality and delivery of English music then was pretty weak – the remnants of Decca's roster of hitmakers like Kathy Kirby, David Whitfield and Karl Denver. So one tended towards material with meat in it, substance. And it was first on Luxembourg I heard Chris Kenner, the black pop without the sugar that Motown gave you later on.

"And it intrigued me. It was like Bukka White ['30s Mississippi bluesman], how maybe those guys would have been expressing themselves in 1962.

"What happened a long time ago was that people leaned very heavily on that Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Chicago Chess argot, that genre of city blues, because of the electric guitar and all the riffs that Wolf had. Everybody ignored more bawdy jump blues: Roy Milton, Amos Milburn and all that. That area hasn't been flogged to death, hasn't ended up

February 18, 1984: Robert Plant & The Honeydrippers perform on NBC variety show *Saturday Night Live*

GETTY

in the form Samson now play – that's about the end of the line for a Howlin' Wolf riff, isn't it? That area is untapped, and all I want to do is jump back into it and pull out little classics."

Are you surprised, considering your own willingness to experiment and indulge your passions, that such an innovator as erstwhile Led Zep partner Jimmy Page has lumbered himself with fossilised hard rock (of weapon-grade dullness, it so happens) as purveyed by The Firm?

"Maybe I am surprised, but maybe I also know that Jimmy's intention of maintaining it as a permanent thing is not the case. I know he intends to record with the Joujouka tribesmen of North Morocco next, combined with some symphonic thing. He's primarily a musician; I motivate and point my finger and create fuss amongst people."

Did you ever feel constrained by a formula in Led Zeppelin?

"Yeah, but I didn't know it was the case until afterwards. At the time I was convinced that I was ultimately very happy with the way things were. Whilst I was doing it, I was always enjoying it.

"I had so much fun, contrary to how it may be reported sometimes. But at the time I didn't realise what you could do if you were holding the reins of your own career."

Plant: exploring the "more bawdy" jump blues of Roy Milton, Amos Milburn et al

STEPHEN DAVIS' BIOGRAPHY of Led Zeppelin, *Hammer Of The Gods*, is a rollercoasting riot of mayhem, mysticism, groupies, drink, drugs, brute ignorance and scenes of moral turpitude unequalled since the fall of Ancient Rome. A terrific read, but perhaps a little wide of the mark accuracy-wise…

"The mood of what has been related to me is grossly deceptive, because I would think that about 97 per cent of the time over a 12-year period it was maximum smiles. We held together and we had a great time, and without affecting anybody else particularly and without becoming sadistic morons. Unfortunately, the more you contradict, the more ammunition and light you give to a subject that has been turned over a million times.

"Over the years, we've all sat back and watched it and smiled. If you get stuck into denying things and setting stories right, then you're a party to it, you're prey to these people. Now I look at it with scorn. I find it funny that people should have waited so long until the heat's gone and the book can't sell to lie so furiously, to paint a picture that's greyer than it was blue.

"He [Davis] did a lot of investigations with a guy who used to work with Led Zeppelin, Richard Cole, who, over the years, had shown deep frustration at not being in a position to have any authority at all. He was tour manager, and he had a problem which could have been easily solved if he'd been given something intelligent to do rather than check the hotels, and I think it embittered him greatly. He became progressively unreliable and, sadly, became a millstone around the neck of the group.

"These stories would filter out from girls who'd supposedly been in my room when in fact they'd been in his. That sort of atmosphere was being created, and we were quite tired of it. So eventually we relieved him of his position… And in the meantime he got paid a lot of money for talking crap. A lot of the time he wasn't completely… well. And so his view of things was permanently distorted one way or another."

Richard Cole is back in business, teamed up with none other than his old boss, Led Zeppelin manager Peter Grant. As for this partnership, much diplomatic eyebrow raising by Robert accompanies on-record good luck wishes.

Ozzy Osbourne once remarked that the only black magic Black Sabbath every got into was a box of chocolates: what about Jimmy Page's reputed pact with the Devil?

"Jimmy had his moments when he played his games, but none of them with a great deal of seriousness, and through his own choice he never really tried to put the story straight. Now maybe he's fully aware of the fact that it's gone on a little longer than it needed to. If you've heard nothing from the actual individuals for so long, then anything's possible.

"It was the fun element: Pagey liked the idea of being considered man of mystery. He really should have been a San Francisco version of Simon Templar, hiding in shadows and peeping round corners. He got some kind of enjoyment out of people having the wrong impression of him. He's a very meek guy, shy to the point where sometimes it's uncomfortable. But he let it all go on; and it's his choice whether it all continues. It's not up to me to start saying the guy plays cricket."

ROBERT PLANT, BY his own admission, is no "master of eloquence" as a lyricist. Though he rates the verbal power of, say, Costello's "Pills And Soap", Plant's own approach tends towards The Phantom, Johnny Burnette, Jerry Byrne and, most of all, Little Richard, where the words are yelps, the abstracted sound of a voice pitching in with the instruments towards an immediate impact yet lingering resonance.

"This Mortal Coil, for instance, is a platform for so much. You can feel the nervousness of the whole thing, yet it's so hauntingly pretty."

And the Cocteau Twins?

"Maybe the reason I was attracted to them in the first place, when I heard them on a John Peel session, I related to it as if it was 'Kashmir', a Led Zeppelin song, or 'In The Light', which had a certain weave, a certain flow to it that was mildly reminiscent.

"When I go and see the Guana Batz, I love the wrecking crews at the front, the blatant *euurgh* of the music. Some of that is still bouncing through me. And I see the audience is totally in sympathy with it, whether it's The Prisoners or The Milkshakes. And then I go and see Stevie Winwood and it's time to sit down and cool out.

"Somewhere in the middle of that is my ground…" *Mat Snow* •

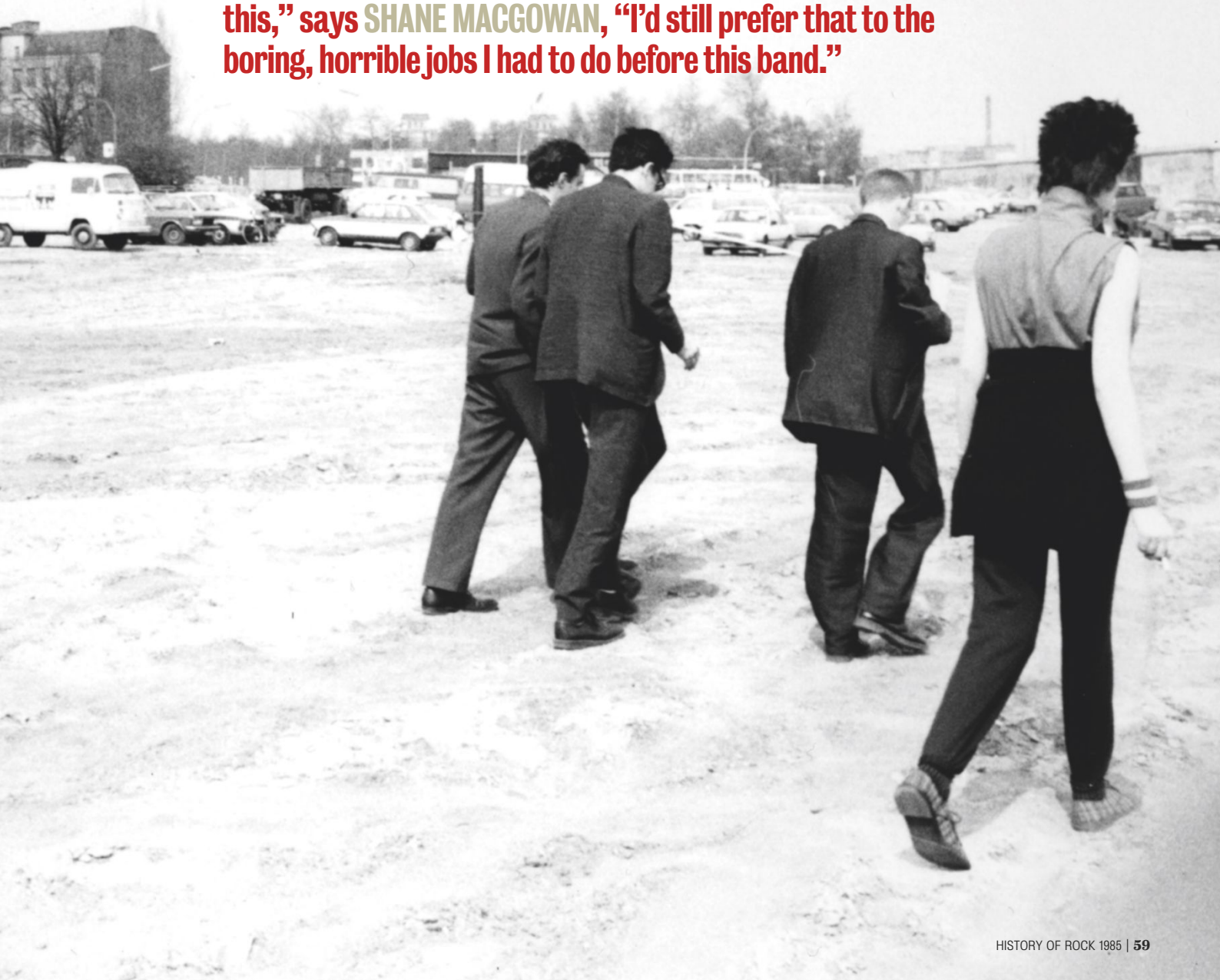
ILPO MUSTO / REX FEATURES

ANDREW CATLIN

"They seem to have really got into it in a big way": Shane MacGowan and fellow Pogues in West Germany

“Ambition. Greed. Money”

Most of these are missing from THE POGUES as they stagger across Europe on tour. “Even if I drink myself to death doing this,” says SHANE MACGOWAN, “I’d still prefer that to the boring, horrible jobs I had to do before this band.”



— MELODY MAKER MAY 11 —

You've got Guinness on your breath

IT WAS SOMEWHERE near old Checkpoint Charlie that we first caught sight of the thin white droog. He is dressed in black from head to toe and has somehow managed to get half a toilet roll wrapped around his left shoe. His shirt is covered in a mixture of horrible stains from last night's gargantuan intake of all things liquid and the residue from the messiest laugh in show business.

It is in fact this latter noise, more of a gush really than anything else, which finally convinces the keen-eared photographer that we do indeed have the man we are looking for. Hey you, you with the bog roll on your feet and the Guinness on your breath, you must be the singer and chief songwriter with the very wonderful Pogues. I say you are Shane MacGowan and I hereby claim my long-awaited lost weekend.

Who do you think you are kidding, Mister Hitler?

SERIOUS? LET'S GET that way right now and talk for a while about the rather unsavoury events that took place in a venue way out in the American part of town, in a three-tiered building called The Loft. Looking back on it now, we should all perhaps have paid a little bit more attention to the guy in the dressing room who casually happened to mention that today was, ah, Hitler's birthday and a few of his spiritual descendants might just take this very public opportunity to let the locals know that the old goosestepper may be gone but is certainly not forgotten.

The end result of this piece of particularly bad timing was that the sheer unadulterated thrill of seeing The Pogues play live to a foreign audience for the first time was tarnished by the very different sensation of wondering what the best form of torture would be for the vile bunch of Nazis down the front, who were making a very good job out of ruining the fun fun fun for everyone else.

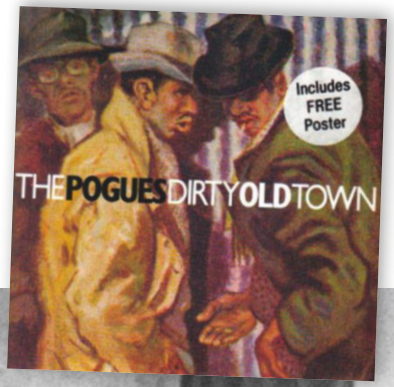
The increasingly glamorous Rocky O'Riordan, or Cait as she calls herself this month, opted for the Redskin school of audience appeasement by offering to take the meatheads on at their own game, temporary banjo picker and legend in his own lunchtime Philip Chevron delivered an inspired and perfectly pitched piece of verbal on how insulted he and his colleagues felt by the sieg-heiling antics of the noisy minority, and I just stood at the back and felt all sorts of little shivers go up my back when the proud strains of "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda" came cutting through the Berlin air like a knife.

The Pogues left the stage to a tumultuous roar and it suddenly hit me after all this time that they may just be the greatest band in the whole wide world. I went to tell Shane MacGowan the exciting snippet of news and he collapsed in a heap on the floor.

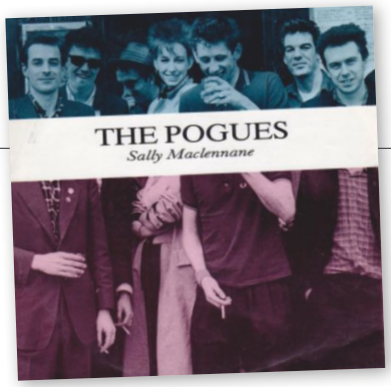
It's a long way to Tipperary, a long way to go

SOMETIME BETWEEN THIS initial collapse and Spider being sick on my new travelling bag, six Pogues, a toilet roll, their manager and the increasingly manic *MM* team made their way through East Germany in a van. And just before the traffic polizei fined us 100 marks and I'll buy you a drink, a tape recorder somehow replaced a bottle in Shane MacGowan's immediate line of vision.

He took one look at it and proceeded to tell it all sorts of things about life with The Pogues, Martin Sheen, Elvis Costello and he joys of looking at the world through the bottom of a glass.



ANDREW CATLIN



"It's the first time I've been abroad since I went to France when I was about 14. Yeah, it's alright, but I'm getting pretty sick of it now and looking forward to going home. The best thing has been the reaction from the crowds, apart from last night, but everywhere else they seem to have really got into it in a big way. Which is brilliant, 'cos it shows that there are loonies in every town in every country, people who just want to go out and get pissed and have a good time at the shows. Brilliant."

The mad urge to get home, however, is probably something to do with the fact that Elvis Costello, or Uncle Brian as he seems to be called round here, is about to start producing The Pogues' second, and obviously crucial, album.

"Yeah, I'm really looking forward to it, you know? I'm not sure just how big an effect he is going to have on how it turns out, because we already know that it is going to be quite different from the first one. There'll be a lot more slow stuff on it, a lot more ballads in the vein of "Pair Of Brown Eyes", and hopefully it will sound even better than last time.

"I don't think that means it will necessarily be any cleaner, or any more professional, because one of the numbers on it will be the fastest thing we have ever done, and a couple of the others are fairly rough as well. You'll still know it's The Pogues."

All this recording and touring business must sap the freshness a bit, no?

"Ha! I lost any freshness I ever had for this band a long time ago. I've just decided that the audience might as well suffer along with me."

It might be prudent here to mention that the above comments and most of the ones to follow were accompanied by the aforementioned messiest laugh in show business, that enormous gush which is hard to describe exactly, but it's something like the noise a very fat badger might make if you were to threaten it with immediate extinction. However.

"So yeah, I've lost most of my original motive for doing this, which was, ah, well there wasn't one really I suppose, apart from to get pissed and play down the local pub. Like if you'd said to me two years ago that I'd now be worrying about being professional on stage and all that, I'd have laughed at you. That wasn't the original idea at all."

Laugh away, but if the original motive has now gone down the drain, then what's taken its place?

"Ambition. And greed (*gush*). 'Cos I'm prepared to compromise to the hilt so long as it gets me lots of money (*enormous gush*). So far we haven't made anything, even though it all seems to have happened so quickly. It took off around the time of the Costello tour and the last time we spoke, and since then I don't really know what the fuck's going on. But I do know that it's got nothing to do with luck.

"We deserve every accolade we get, because I honestly believe that this band is doing something a lot better than the rest of the shit around. The Men They Couldn't Hang were the only ones close to us when they started off and now they've turned into a rock band, which is fine and they're good at it. I think we're unique, definitely."

But they all say that till the first hit single comes along.

"I don't really think that will make too much difference to us in terms of any pressures we might have to face. And anyway, I find it pretty pathetic to carp on about pressures and all that shit when you compare it to the boring, horrible jobs I had to do before this band. Even if I drink myself to death doing this, I'd still prefer that to all those other jobs put together."

> "I honestly believe this band is doing something better"

Well, you sure don't get to meet the director of *Repo Man* or Elvis Costello when you're working on the railways. How did you first get to meet the great Alex Cox?

"I just loosened my trousers and he started gently nuzzling my thingy."

So how did you first get to meet the great Alex Cox?

"We just read this interview where he said that he reckoned The Pogues were quite interesting, and we got together as soon as possible because we knew it would work, for he's such a nutcase as well. It's a bit of a laugh, cos we're being used as guinea pigs for Alex Cox to make a good video and for Elvis Costello to produce a good album for once. That is only a joke, yes?"

Yes, and somewhere round about now the tape recorder gets edged out of the way to make room for retsina and all I can hear are bizarre references to Martin Sheen being Shane's second cousin, and the equally strange tale of how the chief Pogue started off in one of the country's top private schools but left when he had to sit next to [*NME* writer] Mat Snow.

By this stage we're nearly back on the autobahn, so let's just have a final message for all the folks back home.

"Yeah, tell all the women in my life that I love them." Ah, 'tis such a shame that he drinks so much, or else. "You shouldn't worry about me drinking too much. I only get worried if I don't drink quite enough, because then I become all sober and a very miserable person. And we don't want that now, do we?"

April 20, 1985: at The Loft in Berlin, Pogues bassist Cait O'Riordan remonstrates with skinheads celebrating Hitler's birthday

Vorsprung durch alkohol

NEARLY 24 HOURS into it now, and still Spider Stacey, tin whistler and beer-tray basher extraordinaire, has failed to speak one coherent word of English. He did, however, agree temporarily to call a halt to the new language of first-form German mixed with some inspired lateral thinking in order to deliver the following collection of thoughts to a hungry world.

"Hello. I am really surprised at how well the Germany likes The Pogues. Seriously, it's been great and there's a couple of nights when we have really come together more effectively than ever before. It's a bit weird, 'cos I thought the people here would only be into Test Department or punk or Einsturz… Einsturt… whatever they're called, but it's just not the case.

And they also seem to know quite a bit about us even before we go and start playing. Like as soon as we walk on they all go 'oi, buy us a drink' and stuff like that which is pretty funny when you think about it."

And when you think about it a bit more, it's more or less your own fault.

"Well, I admit that we are primarily responsible for this drunken Irish image we have, but it's also a lot to do with how the press write about us. True enough, we don't really go out of our way to play it down or anything, but I think the new album might show people that we're not as stupid as they think. But I'm not really too worried about all that at the minute, 'cos I'm more concerned at the fact that I've lost my hanky and I can't get »

"I'm quite partial to a bit of a disco"

MM JUL 6 Shane MacGowan puts down his glass and reviews the singles.

The Ramones Bonzo Goes To Bitburg BEGGARS BANQUET

I like this one even though it's a bit slow-tempoed for them. I suppose the Ramones have slowed down over the years. It's a grower, as they say in the business, and it's got the title of the week. They're still a hundred times better than most of the shit that I've had to listen to this week.

Deep Purple Black Night EMI

Definitely single of the week. They're back! The cover's even got a colour picture of Jon Lord making love to his organ. It's a no-bullshit song that's got guts and a Ritchie Blackmore guitar solo. It's loud, it's obnoxious, it's brainless, and it's got everything that's missing from most of the other crap that's out this week. It's definitely not music for wimps. Here's evidence that they should have given them £2 million to reform, not just one. I don't think I'll ever be going to see them live, but the classic records are still classics.

Nico My Funny Valentine BEGGARS BANQUET

I really like this one. She's a great singer in her own particular style, and it sounds like a record with something in it – something more to offer. It's as maudlin as The Smiths, but The Smiths send you to sleep before you can even get out the razor. I'm a bit biased because I used to fancy her a lot when I was 16 years old!

Eurythmics There Must Be An Angel (Playing With My Heart) RCA

I don't suppose I better tell you my Stevie Wonder joke right now.

This is nothing like as good as their other stuff. It's difficult to tell when you just hear it for the first time, but I definitely don't want to hear it again. It's just a quite fair white soul with the Stevie Wonder harmonica solo thrown in. He's done it a hundred times, but not very recently. Maybe Stevie just wanted to practise it. It's at least good news that the money won't go to Hari Krishna or whoever he is.

Dansette This Summer (Gotta Get Up) EMI

I like it. I mean I don't like it that much that I'd actually buy it. I've got a soft spot for flaky disco records. It's the sort of music I was brought up with as a teenager. I wouldn't recommend anyone to buy it, but it's a nice bit of summery disco. A good party record for the end of the night.

The Danse Society Say It Again ARISTA

If you're going to make pap records then I'd much rather listen to something like that Dansette record which at least has a nice little tune and it's not pretentious like this pile of overblown rubbish. I'd be happy if I never heard that again in my life.

Jason And The Scorchers Shop It Around EMI AMERICA

I like this one. It's not exactly something that's never been done before, but it's good, and has got some guts. It sounds like the Burrito Brothers, and I like them.

The Smiths That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore ROUGH TRADE

I think the title sums this one up really. His joke really isn't funny any more. The pretty boys on the front cover are getting younger all the time – I don't know what that means. The lyrics are the usual pile of self-indulgent miserable crap, and the tune isn't even as good as it usually is – which isn't saying very much. Do you want any more? I'm very sorry he's so unhappy still, especially when he should be earning enough to compensate for it by now.

Dire Straits Money For Nothing VERTIGO

This is the one the *Daily Mirror* said had the word "faggot" in it, isn't it? It's just about being

LISA HAUN / GETTY

a flash rock star. And I didn't hear the word faggot once! The gay community is up in arms about it apparently, so I suppose quite a lot of them must like Dire Straits. They've been burning their tickets for Wembley for nothing from what I can hear. The song is insulting to women, and probably everybody. It's a typical piece of rock arrogance, that sounds like a Stones album track... and I can't think of anything that's worse than that!

Animotion Let Him Go
MERCURY

This is really boring. This is the sort of song that makes me think of Capital Radio early in the morning. I think their name is a really bad pun, and the band must think that they're Blondie. They're NOT!

James Village Fire
ROUGH TRADE

The first track, I thought was better than The Smiths, and sounds more like Echo And The Bunnymen, who I like. But then the second track just sounds like the late '60s, when people used to produce any old crap with supposed credibility and other people would fall for it. I don't like the name James either – Jim would have been much better.

The Opposition 5 Minutes
CHARISMA

It's quite catchy, I suppose, but not that good. I don't know why people bother printing lyrics on the cover when they don't actually mean much. They probably mean something to whoever wrote it, but they say nothing to me. The only reason I don't mind it too much is because there are all sorts of bits from other groups which they don't put together well, but remind me of groups that I like that do this kind of thing better.

Mainframe 5 Minutes
POLYDOR

Another five minutes! This would be great if it was turned up really loud at a disco. It's a bit like "19" and "Relax" and I'm quite partial to a bit of a disco. I wouldn't buy it, but on the other hand, I wouldn't buy any of these really. It would definitely sound better in a club than on a record player at home.

Womack & Womack Strange And Funny WEA

It's nothing like as good as they can be. I like the Womacks, but on this single nothing much happens. I don't know why this is a single – it sounds like a moderate B-side. I don't really want to slag them off, but when something is this laid-back and hasn't a good chorus, it fails to hit the mark.

Cyndi Lauper The Goonies 'R' Good Enough CBS

This is about as exciting as a good sleep. This is a complete and utter waste of vinyl. I loved "Time After Time", but this is just rubbish.

Don Henley Dirty Laundry
ASYLUM

This is just a bit of standard American AOR. I liked "Boys Of Summer", but that pisses all over this. It's still less annoying to listen to than the rest of this stuff.

The Burmese Brothers Skin SOME BIZARRE

It's not filthy enough. Marc Almond, who guests on the vocals, is only any good when he's got his claws out properly. Marc is a great chanteuse, but this isn't a very good record. Sorry, Marc sweety. I'm beginning to realise what you bastards have to go through when you're reviewing the singles. No wonder they sometimes sound so jaded.

Manu Dibango Pat Piya
CELLULOID

This is a really good club record. It hasn't a hope in hell of being a hit, but I really like it. There's some great sax playing. It's just his usual good stuff with a bit of hip hop shoved in between, but the result is pretty good.

Johnny Rocca I Want You
BEGGARS BANQUET

When I want to get to sleep in the middle of the night I put on the radio, and it's usually a song like this that finally does the trick.

Redds And The Boys Put Your Right Hand In The Air.... FIRE ISLAND

This is the best disco record of the lot. Any go-go record that has a chorus like "*Put your right hand in the air/Put your left hand down in your underwear....*" has got to be good. Most of the go-go scene can be a bit boring and moronic, but this is completely over the top – which is much the best way.

Robert Fripp Network EG

Well, it's got Fripp, Daryl Hall, David Byrne, Brian Eno and God knows who else, and it's still a pile of shit.

The Waterfoot Dandy 14 Days RED RHINO

This one is very weird, very arty, very clever, and still a complete load of bollocks. It's just clever bollocks instead of stupid bollocks.

North West Ten You've Got All Night
ISLAND

Believe it or not, I like this one. It's got every single late-'70s/early-'80s soul cliche there is, but it works. There are a hundred other records that sound exactly like this one, but I still quite like it.

Communal Drop Fanatics DROPTEL

The bloke does a really good Lou Reed impersonation, and the song isn't half bad. After a couple of bottles of cider this sort of dance record would sound really great if it was played really loud. A really good noisy noise that you can dance to.

Bill Nelson Sex Psyche – Etc
COCTEAU

I just can't take it any more. Take it off! Take it off! I'm going home!

a good grip on the beer-tray. I'd really appreciate it if you could issue and appeal for a new hankie."

Anything else while you're at it?

"Yeah. Vorsprung Durch Alkohol."

The world is my oyster

THE POGUES ARE, of course, a deeply divided band in the very best sense, with the Shane/Spider/Rocky camp doing the majority of onstage ranting and leisure-time drinking, while the solid triumvirate of drummer Andrew, philosopher and accordion player James, and the temporarily out-of-action Country Jem ("He is having a baby, no?" – Spider) provide a more mature and occasionally enlightening perspective on the raison d'être of the whole wild shebang. Suitably enough, the ancient and Hanseatic city of Hamburg is just coming into view as James takes over in the hot seat from his schnapp-happy hankieless partner.

"I think the most important thing for me is that we are still an honest band, and it's that belief that keeps me going in the whole thing. I hope that never goes, because then I'd probably pack it in and I don't want to do that. I mean, this has to be one of the best situations you could possibly find yourself in. Going across Europe and you can't even do your job properly!

"Although we have improved quite a bit since the early days, both in terms of our ability on the instruments and in the dynamics of actually playing together."

So what will James do when the storm breaks?

"Oh, I've got quite a few plans up my sleeve. I'd like to act, write a book, buy a canal barge, go up in a hot-air balloon, all the usual things. The world is my oyster, Barry. I'd even fancy being a woodman for a while."

Spider: "A woman?"

Just a wee Lucozade for me, thanks

AND SOMEWHERE BETWEEN the opening bars of "Transmetropolitan" and the closing verse of "Jesse James" it became all too clear that James need not worry about the barge or whatever for some time to come. Uncle Brian is rocking away at the side of the stage, about 900 Hamburgers are drowning in thunderous streams of whisky, and I don't really want to go home in the morning.

Much later on that night, Spider coughed about a gallon of beer onto my bag, the manager tried to beat up the roadie and we all ended up in an Irish bar just off the Reeperbahn that was run by a middle-aged man from Dungannon. Andrew told me that he had laughed more on this trip than he ever had before, and Shane poured a bottle of vodka over the accordion player's head.

This may or may not have something to do with the fact that the original boy from the county hell ended his stay in the Federal Republic with a night in the local hospital and a very sore jaw. Me, I'm eagerly awaiting the new album with Uncle Brian at the controls, and the doctor even says that I might be able to go back to work before the summer.

This is Barry McIlheney, for *Melody Maker*, in a nursing home somewhere in Surrey.

Barry McIlheney •

The power of gloves: Frankie frontman Holly Johnson in full fig

It was just one of those nights...

MM JUNE 29 Showbiz! Costumes! Frankie Goes To Hollywood theatrically wow the West Coast crowd.

EXACTLY WHEN IT dawned on me that this was the greatest show on earth is still beyond my comprehension. It could have been when the Frankies returned for an encore in headbanger wigs – Nasher a dead ringer for Dee Snider, Ped pumping drums under a big-boy 10-gallon hat – and proceeded to bludgeon Springsteen's "Born To Run", to the utter astonishment of the strait-laced Yanks. Sweet sacrilege.

It could have been that perfect instant when Mark O'Toole – resplendent in military trews, bare chest and braces – pummelled out the orgasmic bassline to "Pleasuredome". Or when Holly did a Charlie Chaplin shuffle with his shadow in a soft, blue boiler suit, bum cutely raised to the audience, striking Judy Garland poses precisely on the beat and inviting us to "*kiss me where it stinks*". Or when Holly again, mincing under a tacky blond wig, introduced the entire band ("Nash, the only man with 12 inches!") after the final note had been struck? Or when Marx's head on the video screen illuminated the Californian sky until Reagan informed us, "Frankie Say No More."

It could have been when the schmaltzy "Power Of Love" assumed epic proportions and superseded "Nights In White Satin" as the soppiest anthem ever to touch deep in an emotional moment, just that crucial whisper from cliche, just that shiver from parody, sentimentalism shared. Or it could have been when Paul Rutherford, elegant as Errol Flynn, beautifully tanned, pierced nipple erect, poured a bottle of bevvy over his upturned head and into his grinning gob, then ecstatically showered the front rows with spume. Or... I dunno.

It was just one of those nights, and from the off, I was gone. Even the first page of the programme, picturing Ped, the archetypal brickie, above the quote "Yeah, I'm well into Picasso" smacked of genius.

This Frankie show, criss-crossing the States like some sane extravaganza, was everything Morley's purple prose promised. It has class – they carry Anthony Price effortlessly. It has cheek – gay in every sense. It has abundant energy – "Relax" is still brutally infectious. It has charm – the lads never stop smiling. It has irony – they kick off with "War" and bow out with "Two Tribes". But more, much more than this, they do it their way in a prolonged fit of enthusiasm.

GREEK THEATRE, LOS ANGELES
LIVE!
JUNE 12

It's as if Frankie enjoy their songs rather than perform them, like lads cutting a rug to their favourite songs at their favourite disco. It's showy without running amok, it's precise and yet partying, chemical and comical, straightforward and subversive, finger pointing and fun.

Which was a bit of a shame for Belouis Some, because this young whippersnapper from Sarf London is already getting screamed at out here and he'd have toppled any other headliners over and out. His modern dance with memorable choruses and his style – brusque and bullying – are efficiently complimentary and the stuff of which success is made. A tad too Bowie for some (Carlos Alomar co-wrote some of the songs and jammed tonight), Belouis' "Imagination" and "Some People" are that uncommonest of phenomena – the memorable hip-swayer.

He worked hard to warm this crowd as the evening chilled and then, yes, Frankie came to Hollywood. And Frankie conquered.

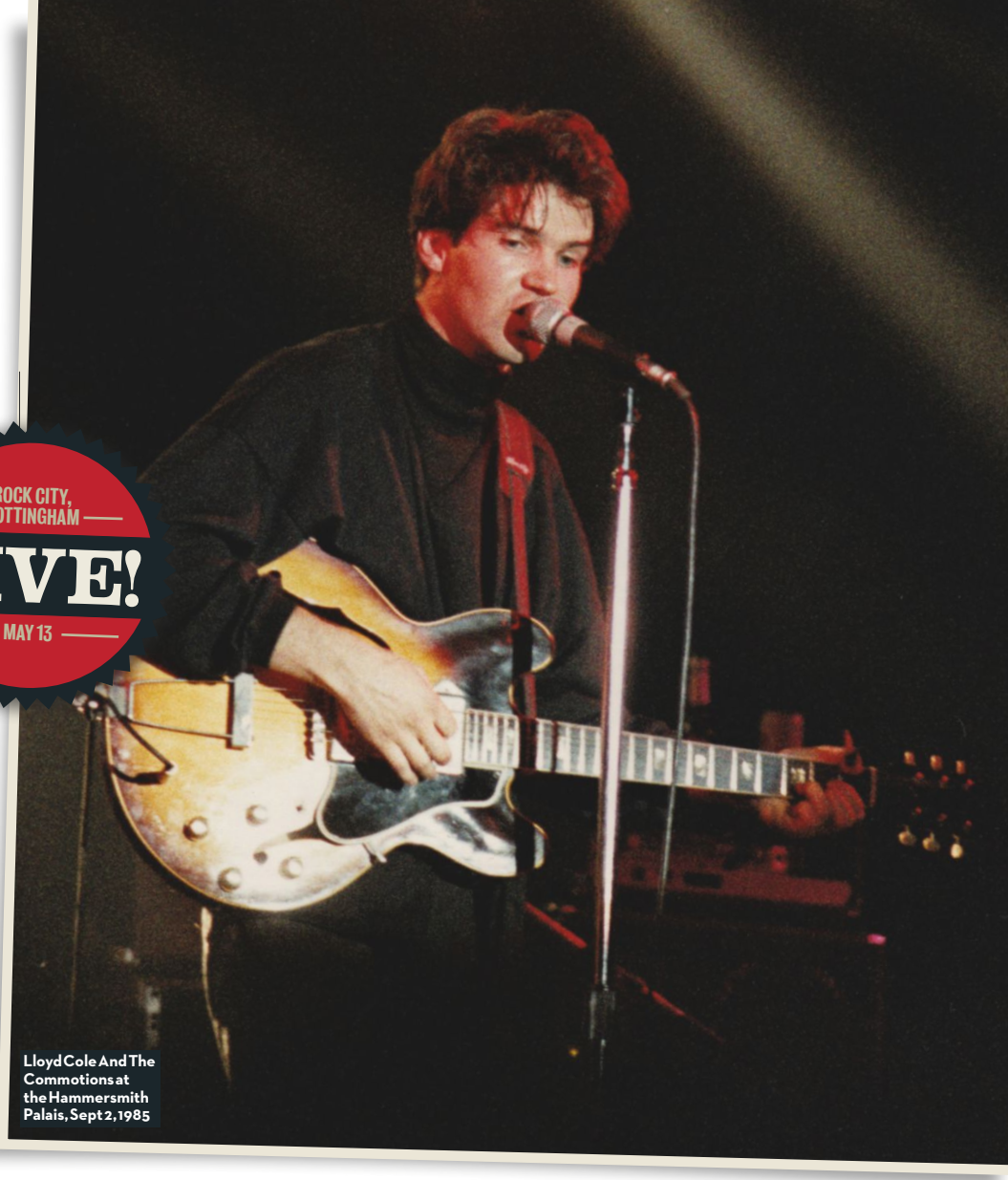
Steve Sutherland

ULLSTEIN BILD / GETTY

Refreshingly populist

MM MAY 26 A slimmed-down Lloyd Cole And The Commotions debut new material.

ROCK CITY, NOTTINGHAM
LIVE!
MAY 13



Lloyd Cole And The Commotions at the Hammersmith Palais, Sept 2, 1985

A NEW SLIMLINE Lloyd Cole opens his first English tour for some time by taking the stage to the haunting strains of Ry Cooder's theme from *Southern Comfort*. (Not) knowing Lloyd as I do, this is surely no accident, considering the sense of isolation the man must feel from the current unhealthy climate in this country, a quite hostile environment in which to perform fragile songs about the power of a summer love, Andy Warhol, and the problems of being an innocent abroad.

Still, rather than pander to the not-so-hard core down at the front by kicking off with an old fave, young Lloyd instead reached out toward the great unwashed and uncommitted by actually taking the trouble to introduce himself and his dreadfully dull-looking band before a note had even been played.

This quite unnecessary display of false modesty ("You probably don't know who I am") no doubt won over the hearts and minds of some folk here who perhaps previously considered the former fatboy to be a bit of a smartarse, and this early success was consolidated when the aptly titled opener, "Perfect Blue", turned out to be a rather witty and refreshingly populist sign of the times.

Best of a brand-new bunch was "Brand New Friend", a radical departure from the back catalogue in its clear exhibition of American musical, as opposed to lyrical, touches, presumably picked up on the recent lengthy trek across the continent and most effective in the near-gospel fusion of organ, sparse guitar and immaculate phrasing from Cole himself.

Of the more familiar material, "Rattlesnakes" sounded as inspired as ever, "Speedboat" fairly steamed along, and as for "Forest Fire", well, absolutely.

At the end, Slimline Cole was sufficiently pleased to permit himself a brief smile, utter a few brief words of thanks, and play "Charlotte Street" instead of the "Wichita Lineman" some of us had been waiting for all day.

This minor complaint aside, he showed tonight that he has immersed himself in a whole new range of positive influences, and looks set to produce a rather special second album at the end of the summer. *Barry McIlheney*

Like a peacock's tail

MM JUNE 15 Sax colossus Sonny Rollins hits London, for a show "crammed with berets".

DOMINION THEATRE, LONDON
LIVE!
JUNE

SONNY ROLLINS, THE greatest living improviser on the tenor saxophone, is such a rare visitor these days that the Dominion was crammed with berets from senior to tenderfoot. It is no secret that Sonny's albums have been a mixed blessing for well over a decade, with masterpieces rubbing shoulders with unworthy funk, but his live performances are something else again, as his majestic performance a few years back at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, proved.

His two opening numbers settled any question about who was The Boss. "I'll Be Seeing You" found the tenor-man pouring it on without stint on a 10-minute solo that ransacked popular song, not quoting for caprice, but extending the scope of his work through reference so that the song form, rather than just this song, spread forth like a peacock's tail. As at Drury Lane, "Umbrella Man" hinted and hovered in the wings until its time was ripe.

"My One And Only Love" was as exhaustively encyclopaedic. Sonny's voracious creativity backed by his staggering instrumental fitness left the house full to bursting. On this form, he is overwhelming, and one was grateful for the section where he stuttered the theme through a series of bald pitch variations, gradually fleshing out the flow, interweaving it with "Greensleeves", jokes and gross low-register honks – a graphic demonstration of the process. The rest of the band got a look in at last on the calypsos and funkers that followed. The great soloist, perhaps despairing of finding challenging accompaniment that fits, has surrounded himself with functional, reliable players. Pianist Mark Soskin and drummer Tommy Campbell did what was expected of them, though neither guitarist was memorable.

"Don't Stop The Carnival", the closer – well, it would've been if the house hadn't forced him to return for a couple of sardonic workouts, serves 'em right – came on as mechanical as a studio backing track, but was emphatically transformed by Sonny's final solo. It was another genius helping of multi-phonics, total recall and structural mastery on the hoof. *Brian Case*

PETER STILL / GETTY

"I'm a miserable romantic"

REM's third album occasions a trip to the band's American South, where, inspired by rural tales, they have found a way to retain their characteristic ambiguity. "Too much these days is simply handed to its audience," says Michael Stipe. "There's no room for imagination."

— MELODY MAKER JUNE 15 —

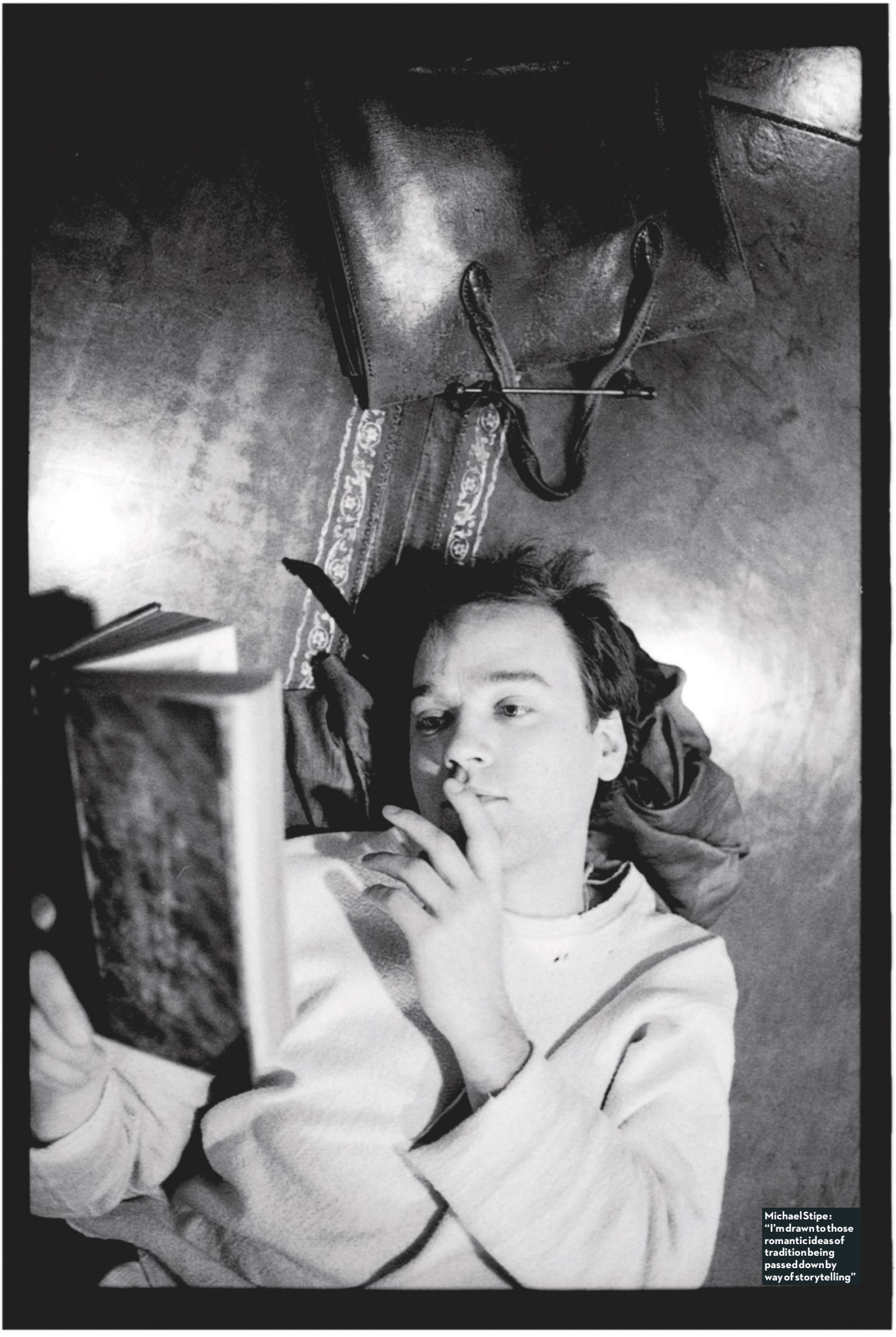
A HOT NIGHT IN Georgia. Peter Buck cracked open another beer and stared down a long tunnel into the past, recalled the early days of REM. Somewhere in the neighbourhood, something howled at the moon and the placid darkness stirred.

"You know," Buck said, shirtsleeves flapping, forever frantic, "the most fun I ever had was when we first started touring, before we had any records out, before anyone'd even heard of us. We'd pull into some town and if we were lucky we'd open for the local hot-shit band and blow the fuckers offstage.

"In our own naive way, we were kinda arrogant. We were like headhunters. Sometimes we'd open for some cool bands, but usually we opened, you know, for just some nobodies who weren't very good and we'd go in and say, 'Man, let's blow them offstage.' The whole idea was to walk on and do, like, a 50-minute set that was like a hurricane blowing off the stage.

"We wanted to present those people with something that was just undeniable. By the time we were finished, we wanted them to think that everything else was irrelevant. I just loved that challenge. And we did it every night, man, in all those bars. Man, we musta played, like, 200 bars, all over the South. We'd go in and there'd be maybe 30 people if we were headlining on maybe a cheap-drink night – 'cos »

LISA HAUN / GETTY



Michael Stipe: "I'm drawn to those romantic ideas of tradition being passed down by way of storytelling"

we always tried to play cheap-drink nights, 'cos that would draw 'em in – and by the end of the set we'd always be able to kinda go, 'See – now tell your damned friends about this.'"

Buck sounded nostalgic for that time, but he laughed at the idea.

"God, no," he said, wiping a flank of hair out of his eyes, looking for another beer. "When I think back, I just remember all the garbage we had to go through. The five people to a bed, not being able to afford hotel rooms, sleeping as we drove overnight, driving all night, all the time, to get to the next show on time. Not being able to bathe. Not having money for food.

"We went four days once in New York without any of us eating. On the fourth day, we borrowed like 20 dollars off someone and went to McDonald's and had a feast. So, no… being broke, starving and evicted, I'm not nostalgic for that at all. I just kinda miss the fun of turning up in these real small country towns, not knowing what the hell was gonna happen. It was always an adventure, you know, and that's what kept us going. See, whatever happened, it was one more story for us.

"Like, we played this gay bar once and they advertised us like, 'Come see the young boys in the band, they're real cute.' So all these queens turn up, leching after the band, not really listening to us at all. And backstage, they're all asking for our phone numbers 'n' stuff. I just cracked up. I just thought, 'What a great way to make money.'

"Christ," Buck roared, "we played some weird places. Weird bars where the audience had to check in their guns at the door, where crazy, drunken guys would come down front 'n' yell and scream at us and threaten to kill us, you know. Mind you, we were pretty rowdy ourselves, kinda like The Replacements, getting drunk and falling offstage and fighting people in the audience, punching some guy if he was bothering us, that sorta thing.

"They weren't real pleasant places, but we were never in a situation that I ever thought was incredibly life-threatening. None of us were ever beaten up, and at least we weren't playing those places you read about in Alabama where they have chicken wire in front of the stage."

I told Buck about the Spit Club in Houston where the stage was fenced off to repel boarders. The night I was there, it was full of rich young Texans pretending to be punks, lobbing bottles of chablis at Joe "King" Carrasco. Buck recognised the scene.

"See, that's kinda trendy trouble," he laughed. "I mean, if those kids came out to some of these bars in the South and tried that, you'd never see 'em again. They'd be buried out back somewhere. Not everywhere in the South's like that. Like, Athens, here, is a nice, cultured, quiet town. But if you're maybe playing the wrong bar in somewhere like Charlotte or Augusta, you don't pull that kinda stuff. I mean, if you do, you'll get like five guys who'll pull you outside into the parking lot and smash your head in.

"But, hell," Buck smiled mischievously, "I'm just a sweet-natured, middle-class kid. I never get involved in anything like that."

LAST NIGHT THERE had been lightning all across these Southern skies. This morning the air has cleared and Athens kicks back its heels in the summer splendour of a bright Confederate dawn. The sidewalks echo to the pleasant chatter of students on their way to classes at the University Of Georgia.

Looking around us as we stroll downtown to meet Michael Stipe for coffee, this is what we find: Athens conforming to an almost classic vision of the South, its architecture a permanent reminder of the great days of Southern prosperity and grandeur, those idyllic years before the destruction and devastation of the Civil War and the bitter campaigns fought throughout Georgia between Sherman's conquering Union armies and Lee's retreating rebels. Today, all battles behind them, the buildings here look cool and elegant, calm in their eternal repose.

Michael Stipe settled in Athens nearly eight years ago, enrolling at the University Of Georgia as an art student. Mike Mills, who would later become REM's bass player, was also a student there, having recently signed on with an old high-school friend, Bill Berry, who would later become REM's drummer. Peter Buck, meanwhile, was working at a local hip record store where he met Michael, a regular customer. Peter would later become REM's guitarist. Michael is now their singer.

And now, too, some six years on from their early bar-band obscurity, REM are the recognised

April 8, 1985: (l-r) Mike Mills, Bill Berry, Peter Buck and Michael Stipe in Athens, Georgia, "a nice, cultured, quiet town"

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

October 25, 1985, Tyne-Tees TV studios, Newcastle: REM appear on *The Tube* performing "Driver 8" and "Cant Get There From Here"

vanguard of the new American rock renaissance, the band who virtually single-handedly returned vitality, magic and integrity to the generally discredited corpus of white American rock'n'roll. Drawing on the popular traditions of that music, they have given us two albums of the utmost majesty, *Murmur* (1983) and last year's *Reckoning*. Both rank among the major landmarks of '80s music and were, indeed, lauded as such by critics who found themselves for once unanimous in their congratulations.

That morning in Athens, Michael Stipe was waiting for the release of REM's crucial third album, *Fables Of The Reconstruction*. He was also suffering acutely from a lack of sleep: he'd been up most of the previous night supervising the shooting of the group's video for "Can't Get There From Here", a bruising cruise buffeted by robust Stax horns that will be the first single from the LP.

We went for a coffee for an hour and talked about movies and art and death: just the thing, really, to start the day. Then we crossed the street and sat under some trees while Sheehan scouted the locality for some beers and we talked about *Fables Of The Reconstruction*. Pretty girls in shorts were a constant distraction, walking the tree-lined aisles of the university campus in the bright morning sunshine like this might be the last day of their lives.

Michael's first idea for the new album was that it should be very clanky and loud and raw; rawer than *Reckoning*, and that had sounded as livid as a Rickenbacker tornado with its strings on fire. It was difficult, Stipe agreed, to recognise that intention on songs of such delicate, overwhelming beauty as "Wendell Gee" and "Good Advices", two of the new LP's most poignantly graceful tracks. Nevertheless, that intention was a real reflection of the kind of music he was mostly listening to as he prepared material for *Fables*....

"A lot of what I was listening to," he elaborated, a scruffy little figure with the look of a dustbowl hobo, the brim of his hat pulled down romantically over one eye, "was, like, cassettes recorded in Tennessee, in the mountains. Appalachian folk songs, field recordings – yeah, literally someone with their tape recorder, recording an old man with a fiddle, with a woman in the background with her hand on the stove. That sort of image, I think, really infected the way I wanted it to sound.

"I also had the idea of it being a kind of storytelling record," he continued, his voice a husky Southern blur, easy on the ear. "I was very fascinated by the whole idea of the old men sitting around the fire, passing on these legends and fables to the grandchildren. And, you know, that little boy sitting over there building a teepee out of sticks, listening to all these stories, taking in all those old legends and tales."

One of the first candidates for the production job on *Fables*... was eccentric '60s legend Van Dyke Parks. Last year, Parks released *Jump*, an album based around the Uncle Remus stories. Stipe thought Parks would be in perfect sympathy with the new songs he was writing, most of which were emerging as vague but powerfully evocative vignettes with an elusive but eventually quite telling air of rural fable about them that began to complement the storytelling traditions of the Confederate South.

REM eventually passed on Parks and other names entered the frame. The group by now had decided not to go again with the Mitch Easter/Don Dixon production team responsible for *Murmur* and *Reckoning* and unanimously agreed that it was time to test themselves with a new producer. Anyway, as Bill Berry would later comment, Easter was now busy with his own band, Let's Active, and was eager to assert himself as a songwriter and performer.

"I think," Berry explained, 'That he was getting a little miffed by the fact that whenever he did an interview that he thought was going to be about Let's Active, the first questions he was asked were always about producing REM. I'm sure he would've produced the album if we'd asked him. At the same time, I'm sure he was relieved when we didn't."

> "We went four days once in New York without any of us eating"

Michael recalled Elliot Mazer, Neil Young's occasional producer, being nominated at one point to work on the record. Bill Berry remembered Hugh Padgham, who's worked with The Police, being mentioned as potential producer. Most intriguingly of all, he mentioned that Elvis Costello had at one point been mad for the job.

"However," Bill remarked laconically over drinks one afternoon in the Georgia Hotel, "I think Jake Riviera and Miles Copeland (boss of IRS, REM's record company) don't get along. In fact, I believe they have a history of *intense conflict*, so that kinda slowed down communications there."

The job eventually went to Joe Boyd, the inspired choice of Peter Buck, a longtime fan of Boyd's legendary work with Nick Drake, Fairport Convention and Richard Thompson, one of Buck's great musical heroes.

Buck: "We just gave him a call and he said, 'Yeah, I'll be in the area and I've got some free time, let's do a demo.' We did something like 16 songs with him in one day. He was in town, here, like on the Monday. He saw us play on the Tuesday. I think on the Wednesday we said, 'Let's do the album.' We flew to England that Friday."

The prospect of recording for the first time outside Mitch Easter's Drive-In studio in Winston, Salem, in North Carolina, provoked no great outbreak of group hysteria.

"I was only worried about the weather." Buck insisted, "which was miserable. Y'all lived up to your reputation, fully. It rained every single day it wasn't snowing."

Neither was Buck much concerned that working in England would seriously affect REM's songwriting. "Hell," he said, laughing bubbles into his beer, "it's not like we thought that coming to England we'd start coming out with sea shanties or, you know, Boy George-type stuff."

Working with Boyd, however, turned out to be a lot more painstaking than working with Mitch Easter. A meticulous attention to detail meant that Boyd would spend hours going over tapes of the album, looking for the perfect mix, the final perspective on every song. Stipe confessed that he was frustrated at the time, but listening to the finished record, can now appreciate the rewards of Boyd's determined perseverance. »

REX FEATURES

At the time, though, it all seemed very distant from the atmosphere in which REM had produced the mighty *Reckoning*.

"That was kinda intense," Stipe grinned winningly, looking disconcertingly like Kurt Russell in John Carpenter's movie-biog of Elvis Presley. "That was a 12-day drunken party. No sleep, just staying up and staying drunk or whatever. We took things a little, uh, easier, this time."

"We set new land speed records on *Reckoning*," Peter Buck said. "It was mixed and recorded, I figure, in a total of 12 days, including a half day off for going to a movie. We just knocked the songs out; like all the basic tracks were done in two days, and most of the overdubs were done on the third day. After that, we kinda slowed down a little."

FABLES OF THE RECONSTRUCTION is the most stunning rock record so far released in 1985, and I don't think I'll be alone in thinking so. Combining the physicality – the sheer, imperious tremendous burn-ass visceral assault of *Reckoning* – with a mature revision of the mysterious, glowing atmospheres of *Murmur*, REM have here crafted a particular masterpiece.

Boyd allows them to sound expansive without making them sound glossy, urgent without being frantic. The tumbling, impressionistic beauty of, say, "Green Grow The Rushes" rests comfortably against the harsher lyrical sting of "Kahoutec" and "Old Man Kinsey"; the strange, elemental shades of "Feeling Gravitys Pull", with its surreal strings and incidental atonalities, falls into place effortlessly alongside the swirling mysteries of "Maps And Legends", while "Wendell Gee" is one of their finest ever moments; REM themselves defying gravity with a song of such fragile beauty, one wonders at its very existence.

At every point, this record sings! Buck's guitar rings through every groove like heaven's own chorus, a six-string orchestra. Berry and Mills punctuate every moment with flourishing drives, discreet accents and pneumatic emphasis; everything they're asked to provide, they provide, usually with ideas to spare. Stipe, meanwhile, turns in his most arresting vocal performances to date. Cleverly, Boyd retains his vocal eccentricities, enhances them, allowing Stipe the clarity of space he's always needed for the communication of his haunting, deeply felt and enormously affecting lyrical stratagems.

Like its applauded predecessors, *Fables Of The Reconstruction* is a vivid testament to Stipe's ability to write songs that illuminate, to evoke emotions and feelings that are never specifically defined. Stipe's lyrics and REM's music describe atmospheres, twists of feeling, emotional panoramas, without ever resorting to pedantic explanation. In some ways, REM has perfected a way of telling the listener everything they want to know without appearing to have told them anything at all. REM are masters of suggestion.

REM apparently relish the ambiguity of the music they produce, are excited by the simple fact that anyone listening to their records will be expected to concentrate, lend a keen ear to what's going on. They've put a lot of work into their music; now it's your turn.

"Michael gets criticised because people say they can't understand what it is he's singing," Bill Berry said. "But I wouldn't want him to sing any other way, and I'm glad we made the decision never to include a lyric sheet with the albums. That would be like going to the movies and getting the script to the film with your ticket."

"Too much, too often, these days is simply handed to its audience, complete, like a platter," Stipe argued in defence of the inscrutability of his lyrics. "MTV is a good example. Television, generally, is a good example. There's no room for imagination, no room for improvisation, for interpretation. Everything is rehearsed. No one's able to find out anything for themselves. It's all become too easy.

"People need to think for themselves again, use their imaginations. And not necessarily in an intellectual way, 'cos we're not an intellectual band, we're not any of that shit, even though we've kinda gotten a lot of that kinda press over here. We're just asking people to kinda stretch themselves a little and put some of their own experiences into the songs or take out of the songs what they recognise… If that means there's some philosophy that they dig out of the songs that's gonna change their lives, then that's fine – but if they listen to those same songs and they make you wanna dance your damned ass off, then that's fine, too. It might even be better."

"Don't tell anybody what they already know," is Buck's concise definition of what it is that REM do; or, perhaps, don't.

RECKONING **TOOK REM** into the American Top 40 – an extraordinary success for a band with no claim at all to primetime MTV, whose records are still allowed limited airplay. On their last tour, they were playing 5,000-seater basketball arenas and hockey rinks. They didn't even have a record to promote at the time, were merely keeping their hands in, working up the live identities of the songs from the new album. And yet they sold out every date.

The potential success of *Fables…* is likely to exert a commercial pressure on them to increase their public profile, sign on for every vast stadium show available to them; to accept the kind of offers they've so far turned down; to turn an impressive independent success into a crushing commercial victory.

Michael Stipe was looking forward to none of this; clearly, the mindless adulation of the world's impressionable millions didn't especially appeal to him.

"I've never aspired to that kinda success," he said. "This, to me, is success." He made a vague gesture with his hands. "Just being here, doin' what I'm doin'."

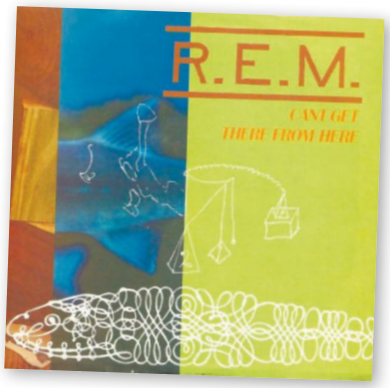
"I really love playing bars," Buck admitted. "I like to see who I'm playing for. We've played these big arenas, man, and we hated it. You know, we opened six dates for The Police and it was miserable. I remember sitting in Philadelphia and it was, like, 105 degrees, and they were carrying kids over the barriers. It's one in the afternoon and you can't even walk around outside it's so hot, and we had to go on in 10 minutes. And I'm going, 'Man, I just don't wanna go on, let's just break up the band.'

"I mean, it was so no fun; we'll never do that shit again. As soon as that show was over it was like, 'Hell, let's go get drunk!' Shea Stadium with The Police was kinda fun, 'cos no one in New York really knew who we were at the time and we only played 20 minutes – that's all they wanted us to play – and it rained during our set, and so everyone was screwing around with their clothes off when we played, which made it kinda neat… But every other date was kinda, sheeeesh…" He shook his head in disbelief. "There were all these really moronic Police fans sticking their middle fingers at us, booing us 'cos they wanted to see Sting that much quicker…"

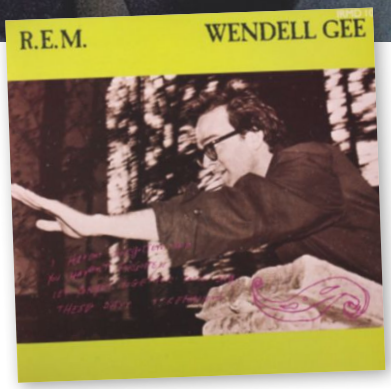
"That Police tour was a joke," Bill Berry agreed vehemently. "The record company tried every means of coercion to get us to do it and finally we said, 'OK, we'll do it, we're curious, maybe we will sell records and maybe people will respond.' But it was hopeless. We shoulda stayed home and written some songs and got drunk for all the fuckin' good it did us.

"And once again, it proved that we are usually right. We shouldn't have played that tour. We shouldn't have listened to the record company. We shoulda done what we believed to be right. Just because we've hooked up with this vast business machine doesn't

> "You know, we opened six dates for The Police and it was miserable"



"America's become like a dumping ground, its culture is dying": Michael Stipe in 1985



mean we have to go along with everything it says. Our intuition has been more valuable to us than any of the great words of wisdom passed on to us by the damned record company."

That morning in Athens, as pretty girls passed by and the sun glowed hard in a bright blue sky, I suggested to Michael Stipe that at the heart of REM's music was a stirring romanticism, a nostalgia, almost, for something that America had lost; a sense, perhaps, that the past was maybe a better place to be, that fundamental values had been lost in the passing of centuries; that our own century had brutalised imaginations, buried hope, generosity and the capacity to dream. This was a century of vandalism and de cay. To that extent, *Fables Of The Reconstruction* seemed like an elegy to a vanishing America: lyrical, poignant, heartfelt.

"Maybe," Stipe shrugged, a little uncomfortable, perhaps, to be caught in such a close focus. "I guess I'm just a miserable romantic… I'm real saddened by what's happened to this century, to the world. Specifically, America's become like a dumping ground, its culture is dying, and when the culture dies, so does the country. I guess that's why I'm so drawn to these romantic ideas of tradition being passed down by way of story-telling, by way of folk music, country music, hillbilly music, the music of the people. Somehow, that has to be preserved."

It seemed to me that REM were making a brave stand against this kind of degeneration: maybe that's why their music appeared to possess such a sense of mission, a defiant optimism in the face of everything violent and despicable the world could throw against it, remained uplifting in the jaws of disaster.

"I guess that's just because we're the kind of people we are," Peter Buck would subsequently reflect. "We're not overly optimistic. When you look around you at the world, you can't be. There's still too many countries where people are being slaughtered right and left and there's still a lot of just outright savagery.

"But you don't just give in to that. Sure the world sucks, but whining about it isn't gonna make it any better. I hope REM does sound uplifting, that would be a great compliment to pay our music. I mean, there are, like, too many professional whiners, people who are, like, automatically negative.

"You can't ignore what goes on around you, but you have to look beyond that. I mean, you don't want to get like, you know, Jackson Browne and get really obsessive about your problems. You listen to Jackson Browne and you just go, 'Jackson, you're rich and you're handsome and you're still relatively young, will you shut the fuck up! Be happy once.'"

"Music should reach out to people – you can't afford to be so introverted. I think that anything that reaches out and touches people emotionally is doing a service, whether people understand why it's moving them or not. We always wanted our music to have heart, you know. That's why we sometimes sound a little weird or cranky, 'cos we always try to leave the heart in.

"And also, we always wanted our records to be like doors to other worlds. We wanted to say, 'Look, here's the door, on the other side of this door there's, like, different rooms, another world.'

"We don't have any answers for anyone; we're just saying, 'This is REM, this is our music, this is the door, why not open it and walk through to the other side, maybe take a look around and see if you like it.'"

Somewhere in the neighbourhood, something was still howling at the moon, stirring the darkness of another legendary Southern night.

Allan Jones ●

BLEDDYN BUTCHER / REX FEATURES

Marillion: (l–r) Pete Trewavas, Mark Kelly, Steve Rothery, Ian Mosley and Fish

ALBUMS REVIEW 1985

ALBUMS

Marillion Misplaced Childhood EMI

In which the lamb finally lies down and brings it all back home with a vengeance. Or the great and seemingly never-ending story of one Derek Dick, aka Big Fish, part the third. And if we take *Script For A Jester's Tear* as being the initial calling card that schooled the world and *Fugazi* as the desperate cry of a smalltown boy well out of his depth and tree, then it has to be acknowledged straight away that *Misplaced Childhood* fits perfectly into its allotted space as the final instalment in this strangely regressive trilogy of growing up in public. This, however, is no mere exercise for the hit parade ground. This is serious exorcism.

As such, *Misplaced Childhood* is what some folk used to call a concept album, and in the best tradition of that particular beast, this one pauses neither for refreshments nor even a quick pit stop along the way. One great crescendo becomes another's opening lazy drawl, one loosely defined song cascades into the middle of nowhere, and all of it so immaculately constructed that you can't really see the joins.

Amateur shrinks apart, however, the true raison d'être of *Misplaced Childhood* must forever remain something of a mystery tale. Both "Bitter Suite Parts I–V" and the stirring "Heart Of Lothian" would appear to have their genesis (sic) in the Fishman's sad Highland roots, but then again probably not.

This wonderfully adolescent game of spot-the-hidden meaning is, of course, half the fun for the thousands of Marillion devotees who will rush out to take this new collection to their hearts and minds and then sit up all night long to discuss the finer points of the Fish manifesto before finally collapsing in a heap, exhausted by the search but united through a communal sense of bygone days and too many broken dreams.

This enormous lyrical no-holds-barred expression of angst and dislocation, while transmitted through an inherently limited musical style, is ultimately what makes *Misplaced Childhood* far more than just another white man's trek through the hysterical jungle of the dreaded pomp-rock. Instead, the overriding sense of blood, sweat and tears manages to triumph over the in-built mock heroics and occasional delusions of grandeur, thus ensuring that Marillion can now enjoy their finest hour to date.

Barry McIlheney, MM Jun 15

Dire Straits Brothers In Arms VERTIGO

It says right here that *Brothers In Arms* signals the official end of a two-year period of hibernation by Mark Knopfler and the rest of the Dire Straits. Clearly, the original Sultan of Swing has a rather odd attitude to resting up, using this supposed break from the platinum trail to get involved in all manner of things, most notably film, Dylan and young Roddy Frame.

Unfortunately for the rest of us, this admirable spirit of adventure fails to materialise when it comes to *Brothers In Arms*. Instead, it all sounds just a bit too like the last Dire Straits album, which sounded not unlike the last one before that, which sounded suspiciously like the beginning of a hugely successful and very lucrative plan to take over the world known as AOR.

And as with all such mega-dollar scams, the basic idea is remarkably simple. World-weary, almost whisky-soaked vocals, a guitar sound designed purely for digital recording, and lots more songs about TV and girls.

Highlights? Ah, possibly "Why Worry", a typical Knopfler ballad-cum-*Tales Of The Riverbank* arrangement, and most certainly the title track, which manages to overshadow everything else on display, showing off the major new lessons in atmospherics and dynamics that must have been learnt on the recent *Cal/Local Hero* soundtracks.

Talking of which, Mark Knopfler will now undoubtedly go on to much greater things, arranging and producing work for a whole host of artists, and generally establishing himself as the nearest thing we yet have to a very English and much thinner Vangelis. When it comes to Dire Straits, however, the old rock-school restraints and undeniably attractive smell of the winning formula seem to block out any such experimental work and what you end up with is something very like the same old story.

Barry McIlheney, MM May 18

REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

Miles Davis
You're Under Arrest CBS

Judging by the cover shots of Miles looking studiedly dangerous with a submachine gun, and judging by the music too, the great man is after the money on this one. Those who long for the old Miles should go straight out and buy *Miles Davis & John Coltrane Live in Stockholm 1960* on the Dragon label or – even older Miles – the new Boplicity LP, *At Last!*, with Miles and the Lighthouse All-Stars.

Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time" – the hit of Miles' last Royal Festival Hall concert – has been issued simultaneously as a single, a clue to the general intention of the artist. She got lucky running into a tune like this - arise Lady Lauper - a gloriously drenched drizzle of a trumpet sound. In fact. Miles himself sounds great throughout; it's the concept the jazzers will quarrel with.

The most substantial piece here, "Katia Prelude" and "Katia", amounts almost to a little suite. Plenty of electronic squirts and ultraviolet gobblings go on from Robert Irving III's synthesizers, there's plenty of rubbery rhythm-section chug, and at one point a near-relative of "Petrushka" appears as a riff. Miles banks in and out of all this, dipping the beak into the beat or scampering in lithe opposition to it, fielding a repertoire of trumpet timbres. John McLaughlin takes an extended solo which bridges the two parts, aching and squalling in the usual ghastly manner.

Fans of Sting will probably want the album for his two-second imitation of a Spanish policeman on "One Phone Call", though fans of Miles will want to tune out the entire foreground of cop voices and sirens to get at the old Harmon mute in back.

Tenorman Bob Berg could have phoned in most of his contribution, with the exception of the title track, on which he's allowed a brief, good jazzman's solo. The final medley features embers of "Jean-Pierre", a lot of washbasin noises, and Miles' joke: "Ron, I meant for you to push the other button."

None of it sticks to the soul like Miles on "Walkin'", "So What" or "All Blues" from the Dragon album. Over to you. *Brian Case, MM Jun 15*

SINGLES REVIEW 1985

The Redskins: (l-r) Martin Hewes, Nick King and Chris Dean

SINGLES

The Bangles Going Down To Liverpool CBS

Some of you poor souls out there may find all this a little bit incongruous. Four gals from the sunny West Coast singing about UB40s and a lazy day on Merseyside might well get up your precious noses, but look, there's the door over there and we'll give you a shout when we get to the Phil Collins single.

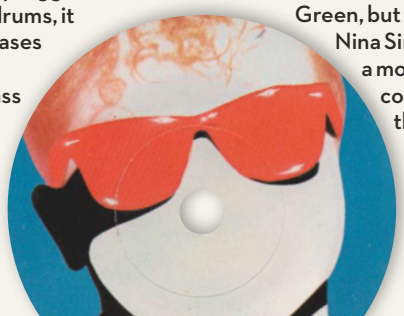
Right. With their reworking of ex-Soft Boy Kimberley Rew's "Going Down To Liverpool", the wonderful Bangles have created a superb slice of pop, so truly pathetic and uplifting all at once that you really don't know whether to laff or cry. The guitars, which we best describe as plangent, are permanently on the point of breaking down, while the combined Bangle voices tackle the whole enterprise with a refreshingly perfect pitch. It really makes you want to throw the towel in for just a few days, and you're looking for possible flaws when you remember that the video features none other than the great Mister Spock. This, Captain, would appear to be a perfectly logical hit. *MM Apr 6*

The Redskins Bring It Down (This Insane Thing) DECCA

Not as fearsome as one is led to believe, but we won't hold that against them. Ushered in on a magnificently ragged selection of bass and drums, it pouts and teases with its odd spurts of brass for so long before seeing any real action, that they come close to losing it altogether. Finally, they hit it with a ramshackle soul groove straight out of Motown circa '65 and Christopher Moore begins to strut his stuff with something approaching a vengeance. Seemingly shabby and disjointed, it eventually hits all the right buttons with infectiously hypnotic effect. Moore rants on about this and that - as he does - but it's those gloriously blustering drums and horns that come out and do all the fist-fighting. In the words of Barry McGuigan, this is a bit special. *MM Jun 15*

Simply Red Money's Too Tight (To Mention) ELEKTRA

A soul beacon made in Britain but bright enough to burn the eyes of any young blade across the world. Manchester's Simply Red have injected both emotion and spontaneity into The Valentine Brothers' club hit, turning a heartfelt attack on the new right into the kind of swelling anthem that should be screamed out loud for all to hear. Mick Hucknall's aching vocals have the mark of a defiantly individual singer and firmly set the band apart from those white boys who would be black. He's been compared to Al Green, but with respect, Nina Simone is a more apt comparison for the strangely fluttering timbre of such a plaintive voice. Hitting just the right note between bitterness and energy, this is one of those records that makes you want to move through its words as well as it's rhythm. It's cheeky, too: "*Did the earth move for you, Nancy,*" says cowboy Ronnie as the fall-out settles. If I was Paul Weller I think I'd throw in the towel when I heard this. *MM May 11*



Phil Collins One More Night VIRGIN

Well, me and Phil, we go back a long way, you know? Why, it seems like only yesterday he had a No 1 hit with that young fellow from Earth, Wind & Fire, but here he is, workaholic of the year, having yet another stab at a top spot all on his own. This one seems more than likely to do the job, but really, if he was playing outside the front door I think I'd still have to pull the blinds. *MM Apr 6*

Duran Duran A View To A Kill EMI

The inevitable marriage: tacky, nouveau-riche pop stars join forces with the Bond moguls for a forthcoming orgy of name dropping, cheap innuendo, big guns and bare flesh. Nothing on Macca's "Live and Let Die" or indeed the seminal Bassey "Goldfinger". *MM May 11*

LEON MORRIS / GETTY

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NEED ANY BACK ISSUES? SEE PAGE 144

Readers' letters

MM/NME JAN–JUN Bragg backed, "riot" derided, Moz mocked and much more...

Put him on a pedestal

What a bloody miracle! Mr William Bragg, alias "Spy Versus Spy" on *Top Of The Pops*. What an amazing feat! Can you imagine his task? Making it big with a voice like a foghorn and all the technique of a guitarist with three thumbs. I have to admit that it was my good self who, sitting across a table in the Latchmere, assured the old boy he wouldn't get radio pay, let alone *Top Of The Pops*. I've been eating my hat ever since.

What a bloody hero! I think of all the cynical, sneering crap he's had to push aside to get to the charts. Long live the lone voice – well done, Billy Bragg!

ANDREW CUNNINGHAM, Woodside SW19

Hi Andy, can't keep you out of the Maker *these days, can we? Don't choke on that brim now – looking forward to your next missive – Steve Sutherland* **(*MM* Apr 6)**

Life's not a riot with JAMC

On reading a recent *MM*, I noticed a report on a supposed riot at the Jesus And Mary Chain gig at North London Polytechnic on March 15. In this account, your reporter states that the "support band, Jasmine Minks, were forced offstage after being attacked by the crowd". To use the old refrain, was he at the same gig I was?

As a member of the Jasmine Minks, I thought I had quite a clear view of the whole proceedings, but obviously my eyesight and memory are not what they were. The way I recall the events of the evening, the first band on stage, Meat Whiplash, were attacked by a number of spectators after one of them stupidly threw an empty wine bottle into the audience.

We followed Meat Whiplash with tense feelings about the way the evening was developing, but we went down very well indeed, thank you very much, with not a missile (or grimace even) in sight. At the end, the crowd were shouting for more but we decided to remove our equipment from the poly as quickly as possible as anyone with half a brain could tell what was going to happen later. And, as I'm unemployed, I can't afford to replace any damages.

I've found that the weekly music papers, in trying to establish the causes of the "riot", have ignored the fact that many people in the audience were drinking heavily. In fact, they drank all the beer in the poly, causing further aggravation for the thirsty wrecking crew as they tried to obtain alcohol and tempers frayed.

I found the "riot" quite tedious really; it was so predictable and I saw many "nice" middle-class boys grin fiendishly to each other as they reached the ("gosh, how wild!") peak of excitement overturning the PA. We took our £50 and left – hopefully there should be no effect on future performances as, having tasted the grapes of pseudo-wrath, we will rely on honest presentation as always and leave sensationalism to those who seek it.

To return to the point of this letter, due to the facts not being checked properly, a total lie has been printed concerning us in your publication and some friends and relatives were worried. I feel I am well within my rights to demand an apology. I bear no ill will to you or any of your staff; I just want to see the facts in print as they were in action on the night.

ADAM SANDERSON, on behalf of the Jasmine Minks

Sorry about that, Adam. We were too busy dodging shrapnel and searching for bev to get out facts right. But then again, facts? Who needs 'em? – SS **(*MM* Apr 6)**

Heavy words, lightly thrown

I don't want to join the growing number of people hurling unwarranted criticism at Morrissey, but surely he leaves himself open to it? Saying video is vile and then doing one for "How Soon Is Now?" makes you think he should maybe take Janice Long's advice and keep his mouth shut.

As he said on *Oxford Road Show*, he has all the comforts and money he needs now and will find it heart-breaking to leave Manchester for "insulated against real life" London. I'll try to believe you, Morrissey, honestly. But why doesn't he take that holiday in the sun – I'll bet he succumbs to the Yankee dollar. Oh well, that's progress in the pop world, I suppose.

Bring on the next righteous pop group. Oh gawd, don't bother! I don't want to be disillusioned any more.

MARGARET, unemployed Smiths fan (still the greatest band in Britain at the moment) (*MM* Apr 13)

Rival pursuit

Give me five reasons why your squib is superior to *NME* (apart from the fact that they wouldn't print this).

ONE OF SIMON BATES' ANAL HAIRS, Crowthorne, Bucks

A sense of humour. An alcohol problem. A Will Hay Appreciation Society. Reviews that don't appear a month late. Writers who can write. OK? – SS **(*MM* Apr 13)**

Semiotic-detached glasshouse

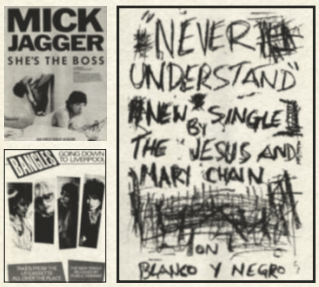
The ultimate test of any political idealist is whether or not they would spill blood for their beliefs. Paul Weller would. The Redskins have. Where does Green Gartside stand? Maybe he would write a thesis.

TONY MEDLYCOTT, Chigwell, Essex (*NME* Jun 15)

Why are Gavin Martin and Green Gartside embarrassed at the thought of excess philosophy in an *NME* interview? Why can't we learn about structuralism and semiotics through the *NME*? Is there no place in England for intelligent analysis of work such as Scritti Politti's? Are the French the only ones who can write seductively about popular culture? I am "the girl in the street" and I demand mental stimulation, not pleasing the lowest-common-denominator fare.

VICTORIA K, London, SW9

For intelligent printed analysis of Scritti, semiotics 'n' all, there are surely no more "seductive" pages than those of NME. *But for those who still find Gavin's piece – not to mention Andy Gill's LP review on page 26 of this week's issue – the "lowest common denominator", there are plenty of newsagents ready to oblige with far more vulgar fractions – Adrian Thrills* **(*NME* Jun 15)**



ITV / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

1985

JULY – SEPTEMBER

THE STYLE COUNCIL, KATE BUSH, THE CURE, NEIL YOUNG AND MORE

"It's 12 o'clock in London, 7am in Philadelphia...": Live Aid at Wembley Stadium on July 13, 1985 – an afternoon of "brutal contradictions"

MIKE CAMPBELL/REX

More than entertainment

NME JULY 20 Live Aid unites the rock world to relieve Ethiopian famine.

THE MOST REMARKABLE thing about Live Aid was that it proved to be more spectacular and compelling than anybody had ever imagined, raising over £50 million for African famine relief. Beamed across the world, it filled the streets and homes of millions with an unholy mix of commitment, sheer trivia and egotistical pyrotechnics.

A Woodstock for '85, Live Aid, in contrast to previous generation's blissed-out fantasies, was pragmatic and focused; a massive celebration of *Star Wars* technology harnessed for a people dying in the shadow of the west's new digital gods.

Asked to stomach the most unsettling juxtaposition of images, from pop prancers to slow death in a bleached-out desert, it was difficult not to be shocked by the brutal contradictions inherent in such a display– people frolicked in the sun so others might live.

Only a handful of artists really seemed to understand the occasion's full significance. Elvis Costello neatly made the link with The Beatles' first global broadcast with a moving solo version of "All You Need Is Love", one of the many Lennon songs scattered through the shows. Others channelled their feeling into performance that were charge with a self-revealing intensity: Bowie, The Who, and an astounding Patti Labelle.

A spread of black artists would have made it a real cross-cultural phenomenon. It was left to the few to remind us of music's real potential– Hall & Oates jamming with The Temptations underlying what could have been.

Whatever, Live Aid was a classic example of western charity. A temporary relief for a problem with far-ranging implications, it demonstrated beyond doubt that pop music really can do more than entertain.

"Concerned over drug abuse"

Dexys: dispute could delay release of latest album

MM SEPT 21 Iron Maiden donate single royalties to charity.

IRON MAIDEN ARE donating all artist royalties from their new single to a number of anti-heroin and drug abuse organisations. The double A-sided single, "Running Free" and "Sanctuary", was recorded live at Long Beach Arena, California, and is out on September 23.

"On returning from our 11-month world tour, we were very concerned to read about the amount of heroin, solvent and general drug abuse that is taking place in this country," said an Iron Maiden spokesman. "The band is totally against this and we hope that this contribution to various drug abuse charities will play some part in relieving the situation. We certainly hope that all metal fans have the sense to say NO. Remember, sport and music is a far better high than any drug, so take care."

The single is available in seven- and 12-inch versions, and comes in a poster bag featuring photographs from the band's recent World Slavery Tour. As well as "Running Free" and "Sanctuary", the 12-inch includes "Murders In The Rue Morgue", recorded at London Hammersmith Odeon in October '84. Neither "Sanctuary" nor "Murders In The Rue Morgue" will be included on Iron Maiden's forthcoming live double album. All tracks were produced by Martin Birch. Proceeds from the "Sanctuary" single will go to The Anti-Heroin Campaign, City Roads, Kick The Habit and Still Waters.

RICHARD A. AARON / GETTY

Seeking an injunction

MM SEPT 7 Dexys fall out with another producer.

AS *NME* WENT to press on Monday, a court battle was taking place in which producer Alan Winstanley sought to halt the release of Dexys Midnight Runners' forthcoming album *Don't Stand Me Down*.

Contacted by this paper, Winstanley admitted that he was seeking an injunction but felt unable to comment on the case because of legal complications involved. However, *NME* understands that the producer is unhappy with the album's inner-sleeve credits, which read "Produced by Kevin Rowland – Recorded by Alan Winstanley".

The story is that Winstanley was contracted to produce the album and agreed to do so on the understanding that it would be completed by March 1 this year, at which point he was to commence work on the new Madness album.

Winstanley believes he should at least receive a co-producer credit

The Dexys, believing that their own album could be completed by this date, apparently agreed to Winstanley's terms. But time ran out while Winstanley and the band were still in New York readying the album for mixing. At which point the producer flew back to the UK in order to get the Madness sessions underway, leaving Kevin Rowland to mix his own album tracks.

Winstanley now believes that even if he isn't listed as solo producer, he should at least receive a co-producer credit. But Rowland, for his part, apparently claims that as Winstanley didn't complete the album, he cannot receive any production credit.

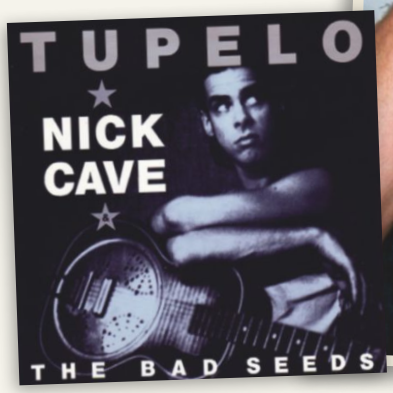
Hence the legal battle, which could see the album's release being deferred.

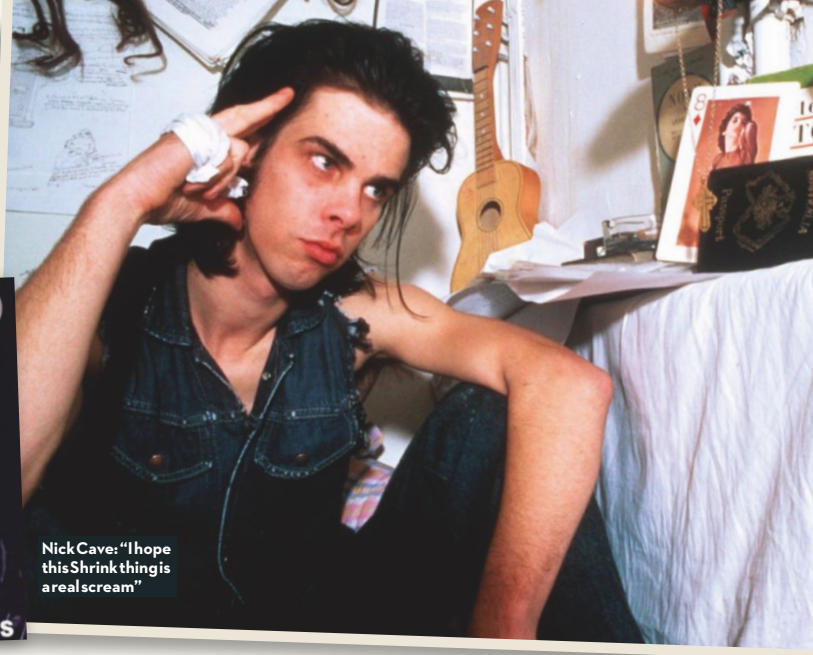
Roland has been involved in a fracas with a producer before. In mid-1980, while working with producer Peter Wingfield and engineer Barry Hammond on the album *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels*, Dexys decided to snatch the completed tapes from Chipping Norton studio in order to hold EMI to ransom. Wingfield, who confirmed the theft, claimed at the time that he was convinced the group would have resorted to physical violence if he or anyone else had attempted to stop them.

That same week, the Dexys placed ads with all the main music papers in which they stated "Music Press writers… try to cover their total lack of understanding behind a haze of academic insincerity. We won't compromise ourselves by talking to a dishonest, hippy press." And now the Dexys, whose initial attempt to promote *Don't Stand Down* by means of a highly touted *Tube* gig was sabotaged by a recent strike, could find their album in further trouble as a result of Winstanley's legal action. There are some who might point out the folly of saddling the album with a decidedly dodgy release date: Friday the 13th!

SHRINK RAP! NICK CAVE

MM AUG 3 Nick Cave submits to the *Maker*'s probing queries.




Nick Cave: "I hope this Shrink thing is a real scream"

Alcohol
I can't answer that one really.

Elvis Presley
He's my favourite singer. Well, he's actually not my favourite singer; he's my favourite performer and alcohol is a convenient substitute.

New York
Well, I would prefer to be in New York than this office, because New York has some inherent atmosphere that this place does not.

The Bad Seed
I can only quote from the Bible here that the... I don't know if I want to... I can't answer that question either... Uh, there's a quote that goes: "We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards." That's in reference to that, uh, "The wicked are known from the womb." There's a quote on every page there.

Tennessee Williams
Pass.

Lydia Lunch
Pass. I will talk to her. Tell Lydia I'm sorry and come home. Ha!

Bingo
Are we talking about my roadie, my old bodyguard? Well, I'd just like to say hello to him if he's still around and he's not required any more in the services of our group.

Berlin
For me, Berlin – and I'm not really sure why – seems to offer just about everything that London doesn't offer. The people there have drive and imagination and spirit. I have a German girlfriend from Berlin, which gives a plus to the A that it should have got.

Revivalism
I think that's probably an epidemic in the music of the last 10 years and it's been a constant problem. That's why I find myself drawn far more to the original than to those who seem to be making a few dollars out of imitating the original.

Health
I know I'm in great physical shape because I had a test the other day and my doctor told me that. I'm happy to have my health.

Fun
My doctor said that maybe I should have a little more fun, but fun is chasing after... I don't know. I don't know about fun.

Catholicism
I think Catholicism is the only true, only worthwhile form of Christian religion. It has its standards and it has its discipline, and it's a hard thing to be a good Catholic. If you asked me about Anglican, I think that is a wishy-washy Sunday religion, whereas Catholicism demands a lot more, and I think if anyone is deciding on religion as a way of going about their life, it's the only route to take. The born-again thing, I think, is puerile.

Band Aid
Pass. I don't know, maybe I was in Australia at the time. Or Ethiopia.

Hate
Despite popular belief, hate is something I try not to involve myself with. It's hard not to hate sometimes – Grub Street, hacks and perverts. I'm surrounded by them all the time. It's a bad thing to hate, but it's very hard not to.

Memory
I, myself, am in some way a slave to memory and I realise, for me, it's the things that have gone, the things that I wish to have again, but one pushes on. A man must do what a man must do.

Heroes
Carl Panzram, Mezzerine, Cap'n Ahab, Raskolnikov, Jack Abbot, Roberto Durán.

Villains
Carl Panzram, Mezzerine... they're one and the same, obviously.

Home
I have a mother but I don't have a home. I haven't lived anywhere for more than two months in six years, and that was a kind of experiment to begin with, something that seemed like a good idea, but I've ended up with a nomadic... Forget all that. I have a mother and I have a home.

Suicide
Like a hospital, it's a warm, soft last resort that's always there and it's a big comfort.

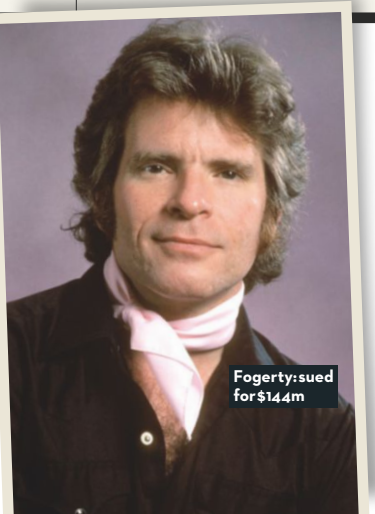
Ambition
It makes me feel no better to be bigger than I am now or smaller than I was 10 years ago.

Fear
I only live in fear of death. That's the only thing, because I believe in retribution. I believe the chickens come back to roost, as someone said. What you've done now, you pay for later.

Comedy
One can only be funny first in order to be serious. I doubt that sometimes, but I hope this Shrink thing is a real scream.

Elvis: Cave's favourite "performer"

NEIL MATTHEWS / REX FEATURES, BLEDDYN BUTCHER / REX FEATURES


Fogerty: sued for $144m

"Mr Greed"

NME AUG 17 John Fogerty is sued for defamation by his former boss at Fantasy Records.

FANTASY RECORDS BOSS Saul Zaentz, who's not without a bob or two, is currently seeking to put another $144 million into his piggy bank suing John Fogerty for said amount. Zaentz, who's filed a complaint in the High Court against Fogerty and Warner Bros Records, claims the former Creedence hero damaged Zaentz's reputation by means of two tracks on *Centerfield*, Fogerty's debut album for Warners, namely "Zant Kant Danz" and "Mr Greed". The first listed track caused considerable legal in-fighting soon after the album's release, with the result that Warners were forced to alter the offending title to "Vanz Kant Danz".

But Zaentz remains unappeased, claiming that Fogerty's lyrics portray him as "thief, robber, adulterer and murderer". Additionally, he maintains that, in interviews following the album's release, Fogerty depicted the Fantasy chairman as a man who so pressurised performers that they lost creativity. This, Zaentz contends, damaged his business image so badly that Fantasy became something of a turn-off to both artists and punters.

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

"The Woodstock of our generation"

Really? Certainly, LIVE AID has raised a lot of money. But with the concert over, *NME* ponders the issues, asking hard questions of Bob Geldof, the Ethiopian government and the Conservative party. What has the event said about the global television age? And what has really changed in aid politics?

— NME JULY 20 —

THOUGH IT'S IMPOSSIBLE to deride the achievements of Live Aid, there were numerous factors in its makeup that made it less than the grand display of cultural, racial and global unity it could have been.

Live Aid relied almost entirely on Anglo-American MTV pop music to achieve its aims. In China, Russia and, ironically, Africa they watched as British and American acts combined with the capitalist hard sell. The west was seen to be making all the running, and perhaps it was the most expedient way to organise the show and raise maximum funds.

But, in the context of white civilised involvement, was it much more than a cosmetic exercise? The music industry is one of the western world's biggest moneyspinners, and even when united for the noble purpose of July 13, it was unable and unwilling to address the furious conflict of interests and ideologies that allowed the African disaster to happen.

"It's not really pop music's job to do this, and I have absolutely no illusions as to our effect on that level," said Bob Geldof last week before the show. "The French government alone could stop this with a relatively small amount of money. The politics of aid is a nonsense; all down the line you're fighting political and industrial interests." »

HANNE JORDAN / ALAMY

July 13, 1985: clearing up begins at Wembley Stadium following the departure of 72,000 Live Aid attendees

President Nixon, 1968: "Let us remember of American aid that it is not to help other nations but ourselves." Nixon's attitude is one that informs the aid programmes of British and American governments today. When they talk of giving aid to an underdeveloped country, they usually mean an under-exploited country.

Ethiopia is just one of roughly 30 African countries ravaged by famine. It's also engaged in a civil war as President Mengistu's Marxist ("fascist", according to a Live Aid publicist) government attempt to quell guerrilla forces. Although British relief increased when the famine came to light, it was merely a redirection of funds from the allotted foreign aid budget, which, on the whole, was reduced by 3 per cent last year.

Long-term aid is only likely to come if the British and American governments think their industry will benefit and Ethiopia and similarly stricken countries reform their economies along favourably capitalist lines. The real work for Live Aid begins after the pop wonderland furore of July 13 has died down and the funds are collected. Unlike the money from the Band Aid single, "Do They Know It's Christmas?", which was used for immediate relief, this time the task is to put the money into schemes which will encourage self-sufficiency. Geldof and Live Aid are going it alone; they remain independent from the Disaster Emergency Committee set up by Red Cross, Catholic Relief, Oxfam, Save The Children and Christian Aid.

Geldof: "We have our own co-ordination in Khartoum. By not operating in the country we eliminate overheads and costs that those organisations have. If you see a Band Aid truck it's probably carrying Save The Children supplies. The same with shipping. Because the cost of hiring is so high, we get three boats and fill them with supplies from all the other agencies and aid groups."

> "Pop stars are egotistical, and rich beyond the dreams of the normal"

There are advantages and disadvantages to Live Aid's solo approach. On the one hand their costs are kept to a minimum, but on the other, without ground workers in the famine areas they could find it difficult to administer long-term aid plans effectively in the months ahead. Whereas long-standing charities like Oxfam have field workers who work with co-operatives and peasants to target the neediest areas.

It was Live Aid's high media profile that helped to focus attention on the Ethiopian disaster, and hopefully the pre-features shown during the telecast will have highlighted why it was allowed to occur. The number of world leaders who took part in the broadcast showed the political importance they placed on this epochal pop event.

President Mengistu of Ethiopia asked to appear thanking Band Aid officials arriving with supplies. But contacted in London the week before the concert, an Ethiopian government spokesman was reticent to discuss the wider implications and symbolic resonance of Live Aid.

"This is not organised by our government but by Bob Geldof and his friends," he said. "Obviously anything that can help the starving women and children we applaud. But we cannot really comment much on this thing, it is very difficult for us. We have been put in a humiliating position, we have to allow our starving children to be seen on TV, it is negative exposure for our country."

He reacted bluntly to reports in *Rolling Stone* that trucks sent for the distribution of food were being used for military and commercial purposes. "That is not true. I feel the Americans are too far removed to know what is really going on."

What is really going on in Ethiopia remains blurred. There are rumours that local bandits plan to storm ports where food lies stockpiled, separated from its intended recipients by mountainous, flooded or impossible-to-navigate tracks. Meanwhile, boxed lunches from the capital's Hilton hotel are much in demand with journalists going to visit the famine areas. "Either you want to send lots of food or else you want to feed the starving. In the second case, what's happening now is unacceptable," stated a Red Cross official last month.

And Geldof asserts: "There's nothing you'd recognise as a road. The EEC are supposed to be rehabilitating the railways, but I don't believe it will happen – they've been saying that for six months. Congestion is the other problem. People must make a leap in their conception. It's not that there's too much food getting there and rotting; even if all that food got through, it would be only a fraction of what is required."

Tony Murphy, the Conservative spokesman on foreign and Commonwealth affairs, confirmed that Live Aid hadn't forced an increase or new perspective on the government's aid programme: "Our position is that we've been giving aid to Ethiopia since 1983, long before the media attention of last autumn."

There are many scientific explanations and eye-bulging statistics used to explain away the fact that over two-thirds of the world live below subsistence level, while there's more than enough food to go round and technology to make it possible. But none are really satisfactory when you consider that British farmers are paid £395 million a year just to store surplus grain, and the UN's annual aid budget for the whole world is a mere £500 million. Or that the average Gibraltarian has 20 times the average income level of an Indian but gets 1,300 times as much assistance from Britain.

"With British dependencies there is obviously a special responsibility," says Mr Murphy. The concept that a well-paid, well-fed person is somehow a greater responsibility than a starving Indian or African kid is one that I find abhorrent. Obviously the Tory government is not yet ready to atone for years of imperialist exploitation.

Live Aid is a step in the right direction – it's not too much to expect from the music industry after the well-documented evidence of indulgence, waste and food fights it thrived on in the '70s. But what happens after Wembley/Philadelphia?

Ken Kragen and the USA For Africa crew weren't involved in the event because, says Kragen, "Bob said this will be the culmination of everything, but I said I don't want a culmination yet, it's too soon." He envisages taking the campaign into other areas, starting with publishing. He hopes it will continue for 10–15 years.

For his part, Geldof sounds uncharacteristically weary.

"At the moment we're pinpointing areas we can go into, but after that I don't know. I never wanted Band Aid to go on very long; then it would become an institution like ICI or the *NME*."

It would be a shame if pop music missed its chance to build on the impetus created by Live Aid. There are things that can be done to help alleviate the world's hunger crisis that don't have to involve mass capitalist/celebrity fund-raising.

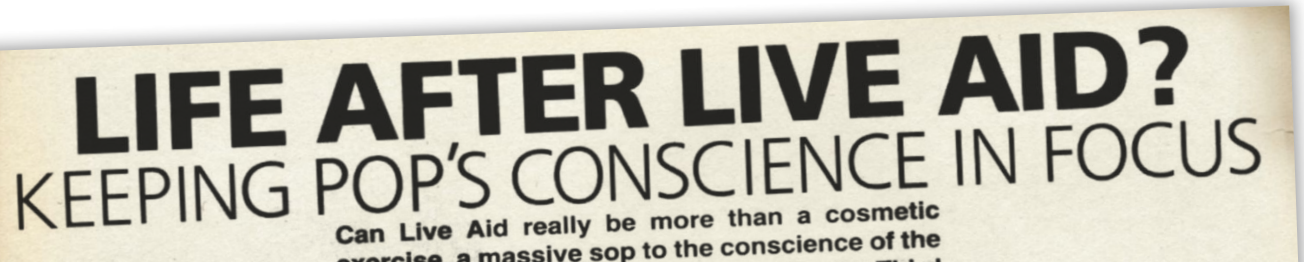
Pop stars and their fans can lend their support to a parliamentary lobby for aid reform on October 22, led by Oxfam. They'll be arguing for localised food production, reduction of the debt burden and the arms trade, and an equalisation of the unequal trading relations between the west and the third world – where their exports plummet and our imports flood the market.

Like Band Aid, it's another small step, but put together they add up. Pop has shown it can raise funds. Now let's hear it raise its voice. *Gavin Martin*

— NME JULY 20 —

JUST ABOUT THE time that the 70,000 in the centre of the mediarena were filing, as instructed, towards the exits, I was emerging from the local tube station; returning from a dismally attended benefit for sacked miners in Brixton. Clustered around the underpass entrance, a crowd of people were huddled around a portable TV set watching the celebrations and congratulations. Summer's here and the time is right… for TV in the street.

In the last few months the power of the cathode ray has brought us those first shocking pictures of the human misery in Ethiopia, the sight of burning stands and flaming fans from


LIFE AFTER LIVE AID?
KEEPING POP'S CONSCIENCE IN FOCUS
Can Live Aid really be more than a cosmetic

"You have money – give it!": Bob Geldof visits Ethiopia after his memorable exhortations during Live Aid

the Bradford City stadium fire, the images of *Clockwork Orange* Britain overflowing into a Brussels stadium and now Live Aid – McLuhan's Global Village party, the biggest media event of all time. In dramatic terms, the first three atrocity exhibitions were all just part of the build-up. Live Aid was the final act – the resolution.

As a media blitz its effect was certainly devastating. Even those most alienated from the stadium mentality were pinned to their seats by the sheer size of the spectacle.

I returned home to discover my flatmates, one a member of an experimental pop combo and the other the bearer of an unimpeachable pedigree of hipness, watching Robert Plant and Jimmy Page – "So this is 'Stairway To Heaven'."

It blared from every window, it brought TV viewing spilling out onto the streets, it brought over £50 million worth of aid to the starving – and all by dangling a few pop-star shaped carrots in front of a few billion people. Some achievement? Well yes, but…

On the level of its ultimate achievement, Live Aid is irreproachable, as we were constantly reminded throughout the 16-hour broadcast. Are we therefore expected to accept that the end justifies the means? Not to say that there's something wrong when a man of Geldof's means, a man with a daughter called Fifi Trixibelle for Christ's sake, flings castigations into every threadbare sitting room up and down the country? Or that there's a pall of one-upmanship about the bidding for honours to bestow on him – "Nobel prize!", "Knighthood!", "Sold!".

There was always something self-defensive about the presentation of Live Aid; it seemed to be perpetually anticipating criticism, blacking in advance the name of anyone who should seek to smear in print the pristine halo accorded to Saint Bob.

Michael Buerk, the BBC journalist whose early reports provided the spur for the formation of Band Aid, was the one man granted the right to invective by dint of his prior involvement in the tragedy. The description of Geldof as "self-styled clapped-out pop star turned media saint" would have brought howls of derision and countless accusations of sour gripes had it come from a less accredited source.

He was also the only one allowed to make a swipe at the "justified self-righteousness" (*The Observer*) of the performers themselves. "Pop stars are egotistical," he pronounced with the fervour of the blasphemous. "They're also rich beyond the dreams of the normal, let alone the destitute – but they are not indifferent."

This was the key to the event: if Nik Kershaw is to exist, is it not best that he should put his dubious talents to some use that is beneficial to humanity? Well yes, but there's still something sick about the juxtaposition of the preening culture of British pop, so concerned as it is with third-hand notions of movie-star glamour, with sights of swelling stomachs and wasted bones. It's one step away from an eat-in for Ethiopia.

"It could have been a disaster," said Mel Smith, making one of the most striking accidental puns of the day, and our sight of the real disaster was limited. There was Buerk's hard-hitting presentation at the very beginning; otherwise our only glimpse of the suffering these faintly nauseous proceedings were supposed to alleviate was the short clip from CBS News. "These pictures speak for themselves," said David Bowie introducing them. And yet they weren't allowed to – tragic though these pictures were, there was something genuinely pornographic about ladling over them the thick syrup of a pop song soundtrack. To the American viewer, idly flipping through the channels, it must have looked like the most sensationalist pop video ever made.

"A great use of television," they enthused on *Breakfast Time* about the clip. People cried of course, but more because of this use of television than because of the human misery involved. Did they cry every time the same pictures were shown on the news?

Live Aid was unmistakably more about television than it was about anything else. With two giant video screens flanking a distant stage, most of the attendant thousands were only watching on-site TV. Theoretically it subscribed to one of the great misquotes of history – "The medium is the message." Just the very fact that the medium (television) was bringing these images into five billion homes was enough to reason that the message was clear.

What Marshall McLuhan really said was "the medium is the massage", and this was closer to the truth. What Live Aid did, as well as drum up money from viewers, was provide a relief conscience massage for the pop stars involved.

"You have money, give it!" Geldof was heard to demand several times, with the same authority with which he would order people to sing later on. But what of those "rich beyond the wildest dreams of the normal". Just exactly what were they giving, their time??

"These people aren't playing here for the good of their health," he continued, becoming more and more unbearably petulant. Give this man a knighthood?? With behaviour like this it's probably what he deserves.

Meanwhile the BBC themselves, who would under normal circumstances have had to pay every musician a minimum Musicians' Union fee, made a donation of an "undisclosed sum" to the fund. Even that information was reluctantly disclosed.

When politics encroached on this mass-media message, it was treated with conspicuous unease. The first example was the Austrian contribution, which was infinitely harder than either "We Are The World" or "Do They Know It's Christmas?". "*Famine is a useful method / It keeps the masters in power*," it proclaimed. "*We're giving money so we can feel better*," it continued. This dampening of the generally celebratory procedure was prematurely foreshortened, however, as the subtitles went mysteriously missing. All that was left was a bunch of singing heads – just like the others.

It may be seen as a sign of optimism that, in a time when the English government doggedly preaches the early Geldof philosophy of "Looking After Number One", the great media event is dedicated to those good old-fashioned Tory wet values of care and compassion. Yet when Germany's Udo suggested that perhaps some of the money drained into nuclear weapons could have been poured into the drought-stricken land, the switchboards were apparently jammed with complaints. That's how little the real issues sank in.

"It's the Woodstock of our generation," gushed one of the hideously nouveau bourgeois Spandau Ballet boys. Woodstock was the innocence and ignorance of a runaway generation; Live Aid was corporate pop turned corporative charity – royal patronage and all.

Towards the early morning, images of countless stadia were superimposed, one upon another, each one flaring lights, milling people and flashing screens. Members of Led Zeppelin played "Stairway To Heaven", Eric Clapton played "Layla", Duran Duran played something that wasn't early Roxy Music no matter how hard it tried. It was the triumphant return of the stadium mentality.

I hope the £50 million does some good – but I didn't like what I saw.

Don Watson ●

REX FEATURES

MIKE PRIOR / GETTY

Paul Weller, Dee C Lee and Mick Talbot of The Style Council recreate a long hot summer in a London photographic studio, 1985

“I do what I do best”

Engaged as ever with youth causes, a trip to Denmark leads PAUL WELLER to wonder if the focus has shifted too far away from his music. “I’m not one of these smart fuckers that went to public school. I’m not a left-wing intellectual who’s got everything worked out, you know?”

— MELODY MAKER JULY 13 —

THE BEST BAND in the world!

Paul Weller said that, and he was talking about Style Council at the time, that small but beautifully formed unit he set up around two years ago, after The Jam had finally come to the end of a very popular road. Naturally enough, he can easily be accused of being just a touch biased when it comes to assessing the Council’s position in the overall scheme of things, but it seems he’s not the only one prepared to stand up and make a bit of a claim. Style Council’s second album, *Our Favourite Shop*, has just shot into the higher echelons of the charts in Britain, it’s apparently selling like hot cakes everywhere from France to the Far East, and even here in Denmark, well, they just can’t get enough of it.

The people’s champ from deepest Woking has never been a man for selling himself short, but it is immediately clear that the success of this latest project has totally rekindled the long-lost enthusiasm for this crazy world of pop and put him right back at the very top of the tree. Once more then, as I carefully enquire whether he really believes that this year’s Style Council is easily the best band in Britain. »

"We're the best band in the world."

Next you'll be telling me that you're bigger than Jesus.

"Well, bigger than The Jesus And Mary Chain."

Some 24 hours before this particular exchange of big talk and bad jokes, Style Council had travelled to a spot called Roskilde, about 50 miles from Copenhagen and the home of Denmark's annual pop and jazz festival. The welcome they received from the European press corps would surely have convinced an impartial observer that Mr Neil Kinnock, or at the least Mr Arthur Scargill, had just arrived in town.

"Anybody got any questions on music?" Weller asks rather forlornly, and yes, we did have six or maybe seven, with the obvious highlights being the unfortunate Scandinavian woman who wanted to compare your last album, *The Gift*, with your new one ("It's two different bands, you know") and the German chap who told Mick Talbot that *Our Favourite Shop* was a bit close to easy listening and altogether too laid-back ("Well, you're listening to it wrong").

Everybody laughed when Paul Weller nominated himself as most wonderful human being for 1985, and then the smudgers came along to snap away at his new barnet and rather spiffing pair of shorts. And one hour later, the Style Council played the best open-air show I have seen this year since Style Council played Glastonbury just a week previously. We all went back to the hotel as soon as it finished and were in bed well before the local curfew came into effect. Rock and roll, phew!

THE TOWN OF Elsinore sits on the very northern tip of Denmark and is, of course, famous to all English Lit buffs for its heavy Shakespearean connotations. Indeed, a fairly striking statue of the young crown prince Hamlet himself stands just a few yards away, as the keyboards player with the best band in the world starts talking about life as the less public half of Style Council. His name is Mick Talbot, and Billy Bragg reckons his excellent selection of jackets makes him look like a stick of rock, although Michael himself prefers the more obvious Dick Van Dyke comparison. He is two months younger than Paul Weller and nobody knows too much else about him.

"I don't really mind the fact that everybody always wants to talk to Paul. I mean, it's pretty logical, he's obviously the frontman and he writes the lyrics as well. Plus he's got a lot of history, and that's very important, especially when you come abroad, because they just want to turn it into a 'Paul Weller, this is your life' situation and go through all his various stages in great detail. But no, I don't mind that.

"Basically, we both enjoy a bit of a laugh. I do get wound up about things, but they have to get pretty extreme, and maybe Paul is more forthright in speaking his mind than I am. I'm a bit more guarded, which is probably a bad thing in the long run. And I'm obviously not as involved with things like the International Youth Year, although I do go along to quite a few meetings and take a fair bit of interest in the YTS stuff. Anyway, here comes the leader, so to speak – maybe he can tell you a bit more about it."

Here he comes indeed, dressed for the occasion in blazer, classic Fred Perry, white bags, black shoes and, most importantly, not a sock in sight. Still, at least you've got your trousers on, unlike yesterday when the old legs were very much in evidence. Pity nobody at the press conference cracked a joke about them.

"It does piss me off a bit when they only talk about politics, but obviously there has to be a bit of that because of the album. It would be great if they could span everything, but I'm not really moaning, because obviously we set ourselves up for it to some extent with the lyrics and the other involvements.

"What I don't like, for example, is when I am asked things like was Arthur Scargill a good leader, or where did the miners go wrong. What are they doing asking a fucking pop group questions like that? I just try to look at it from a striking miner's point of view if I can. Which is hard, because none of us had to stay out on strike for 12 months or live on the breadline for 12 months, you know?"

You told us yesterday that Labour would win the next election, and I wonder if it was just another joke?

"I definitely think they will win. I can't see how they won't get in. Maybe I shouldn't say that, but that's what I think. I mean, I can see why the Tories appealed to lots of working-class people, because they were promising help with your mortgage and things like that. But by now Thatcher has shit on practically everyone, and looking at it optimistically you'd reckon that most of those people who voted for her will have had their eyes opened and change their opinion because of it.

"If Labour win, I suppose I wouldn't mind getting involved. I'd like to have an input somehow, but not on a body that was just made up of people from the pop world. It's a cliche, but it's true that those people in Parliament are out of touch.

"I mean, it's only in the last year or so that Labour has started to look towards young people again. I don't fancy being a local councillor or an MP, but I do want to contribute ideas. And I don't want to get involved with anything that means I have to stop doing what I do now, because I actually enjoy doing this. I just do what I think I do best, that's all."

There are, of course, a number of folk in this wacky world of pop who don't think you do it very well at all. Young Lloyd Cole is just the latest to have a bit of a dig, attacking the blustering "Walls Come Tumbling Down" as a fairly naive piece of work which demeans the sentiments behind it and sounds like the efforts of a man who has just read his first George Orwell book.

"Well, I don't think somebody like Lloyd Cole has got any room to say that. What I wanted to say with 'Walls…' was quite simple, so why complicate it? I

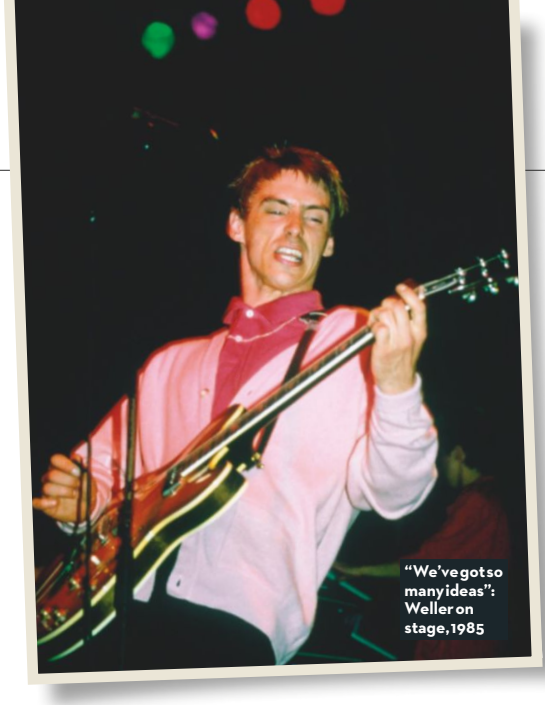
GETTY

Weller scarfs it as Talbot models latest "stick of rock"/Dick Van Dyke blazer

don't think that it's naive at all. That's how I feel and to me that's how simple things are. I'm not really one of these smart fuckers that went to public school; I'm not a left-wing intellectual who's got everything worked out, you know?"

Maybe that's also why so many people are madly in love with your band?

"Yeah, maybe, I don't really know. I do think it's important that something like the Labour party is given back to working-class people, and that also applies to the whole of the British left."



"We've got so many ideas": Weller on stage, 1985

THE WOKING WONDER is just a bit closer to that time of life when teenage dreams seem to be nothing more than a distant memory. It's an awful long way from 1976, but not a stone's throw from 1988, when the original angry young man ("that's another cliche") will have reached the ripe old age of 30. Must be near time to get a real job.

"The sort of thing we did at the festival yesterday felt OK, really natural, but yeah, I'd feel a bit of a tit doing *Top Of The Pops* or *Saturday Superstore* when I'm 30. Anyway, the whole thing about '76 and '77 has been totally romanticised – there were only a couple of other bands that were worth anything and they turned out to be real wankers in the end.

"I don't think the same sort of thing will ever happen again, but if it does and people were to say, 'Well, that Paul Weller's a boring old fart', then fair enough. So long as they are 17 or 18 themselves, that's OK. It wouldn't bother me at all. But I honestly don't think I'm that far removed from how I used to feel when I was that age.

"That's why I don't really mind when The Redskins or somebody else slag me off, 'cos I used to do it all the time. It's dead natural – like the way I used to slag off Townshend and all that crap. Yeah, I do regret it now, but like I say, it's the natural thing to do at that time.

"As for the future, I don't really look at the Style Council in terms of how long we are going to do it for. I just feel there is so much left in it, so much still to do. We've got so many ideas that we haven't tried out yet, things that we have talked about and are keen to put into action. We get loads of ideas all the time. I'm probably happier now than I've ever been, because I just feel so right about what I'm doing in this band.

"It's really funny for me to say that to you when you think about it, because I've been playing music for, what, 14 years, but really, it's great. It's given me a new lease of life and it's sort of rekindled my enthusiasm for everything, particularly the potential of pop music. It probably wouldn't have been quite so good if I had done it earlier, because it seems to be happening at just the right time for me and Mick. If we'd done it when we were 18 and hadn't done all those things in the past, then it probably wouldn't have been quite so good."

This is all getting a bit serious, so it's maybe time to try out the suggestion that Paul Weller must feel like a bit of a father figure in the band, what with all these young buckos around the place.

"A father figure?" (*prolonged chuckling*). "I'm not that fuckin' old! I suppose that, yeah, I can see some of my own attitudes when I was 19 in Steve White, but a father figure? Dunno about that one! It's always been important for us to work with young musicians if possible, but there's not much point in putting together a teenage band just for the sake of it. There's such a wealth of really good musicians in Britain that you never get to hear about – somebody like the bass player Camelle Hinds, who is brilliant but quite hard to find."

And you even let the roadie play guitar on the live version of "Our Favourite Shop", no doubt in an effort to demystify the whole process, break down the barriers, storm the barricades and all that?

"Nah, it's just 'cos he's a better guitarist than me, that's all. If I could play that one as well, then I'd do it."

A 27-year-old ex-mod who can't really play the guitar. Sounds like a perfect candidate for a spell in journalism.

"I've never really considered a career outside music, because I enjoy it so much. I actually like being in a group, you know? The thing I don't like about journalism is that it's not very immediate. You never get to see people's reactions to what to do, whereas when you play in a band you get that immediate 'love it or hate it' reaction which I like. Otherwise it's a bit like all those old painters who had to wait until they were dead before anybody appreciated their work.

"Pop music is so immediate, and that's one of the things I really like about it. A novel or something requires a lot more in it than a three-minute pop song, and I just find it a lot simpler to get my ideas across within a three-minute song.

"I suppose if I really wanted to write a novel then I'd go ahead and do it, that's the way I am. Anyway, no point in writing my memoirs or anything like that, 'cos they'd be so fucking boring! And only three pages long."

Still, there's always the movies.

"Again, I've got no desire at all to become an actor. I can't act for one thing, and you only have to look at the videos for proof of that. I like the experience of going to the pictures more than the actual film that's on. The queueing up, the popcorn, things like that."

Books?

"I'm a bit pissed off with books at the moment; the last one I read was *Nowhere To Run*, which is a collection of interviews with soul artists from the '60s. I don't read the papers either – maybe the *Mirror* if it's lying about – and I only read the music press if we're in it or if somebody like Bragg or The Redskins are interviewed.

"The one thing I hate about music writers is when they make up the questions after the interview and insert them into the piece. And also, the ones who don't write in the same way they talk. I prefer it to be more natural than that. Although most of the things written about me have been pretty fair, whether it's criticism or praise.

"I don't really give a fuck any more about what anyone thinks of me. That's being honest. It might sound a bit blasé, but really, so much stuff has been written about me and so many people have their own different opinions about me that I've just reached the stage where I don't care any more. You spend seven or eight years of your life justifying your very existence to the world and you're continually being asked to explain yourself in everything you do. It's ridiculous."

> "I still hate most of the things associated with rock'n'roll"

The man who couldn't care less. Sounds like the perfect epitaph for Paul Weller, the one pop icon who, more than any of them, has had to wash his dirty linen in public since the very first day he set foot on the London stage.

"Actually, I won't be having an epitaph, 'cos I'm going to have a Viking burial. They're gonna put me in a boat, set fire to it and then push me out to sea."

Rock'n'roll!

"I still hate most of the things associated with rock'n'roll. Like that festival yesterday, there were just so many bands doing horrible guitar solos, and all that leather. All those horrible rock'n'roll leather jackets."

Piss off, Paul.

"Nah, yours is OK. It's not really rock'n'roll leather, you know? It's more Take Six that one, innit?"

SOON AFTER THIS last spot of merry banter, Style Council went home to England for a short break in their extensive schedule of summer concerts in Europe and beyond. The best band in the world? The last great stand against rock'n'roll? A Viking burial?

Dunno about all that, but the good news is that, after all this time, the top graduate from the school of '76 is embracing the new politics-with-a-grin approach of the best of the class of '85, and doing it, as always, with quite memorable style. Eight years on, and Paul Weller is at long last game for a laugh. *Barry McIlhenney* •

ILPO MUSTO / REX FEATURES

Pandemonium

MM JULY 13 Bruce Springsteen seduces the masses.

THE CBS HOSPITALITY enclosure was shielded from the rest of the stadium backstage area by a structure that took the form of a car, a very big car with number plates bearing the legend: BRUCE. The correct pass entitled you to walk through the passenger doors into the world of New Jersey. Or as close as they could get to it.

Here, the walls were covered with posters of Springsteen, the bar was stocked high with Budweiser and Colt 45, and the caterers were selling "Bruceburgers – 100% beef", "Mainstreet dogs" and "E Street cheesecake". A man dressed as a US cop strolled purposefully around the popcorn stand.

WEMBLEY STADIUM LONDON
LIVE!
JULY 3

When Bruce Springsteen comes to town, even the record company goes crazy.

The build-up, of course, had been going on for months, the existing fanaticism fuelled by 127 hit records from Bruce and a progressively hysterical reaction from Fleet Street. Finally, the nation was gripped in an agony of waiting.

And as the weeks turned into days and the days flew past and there was suddenly only half an hour to go, the whole of the Wembley Stadium felt so much like an unbearably big bubble about to burst that it really hurt. And then came the relief, the euphoria, the damned great urge to cry when Springsteen and the E Street Band ambled on stage and launched into "Born In The USA".

This is the elusive rock'n'roll moment that we all spend so much time, energy and money chasing, and yet rarely find. When it happens in the Marquee, that's brilliant. When it happens in Wembley Stadium, I'm reminded more than anything of Janis Joplin's infamous quote: "It's better than anything; better than an orgasm."

More than anything, this night offered melodrama of the highest order, an overwhelming sense of occasion, the feeling of being at a Terribly Important Event. I'm a sucker for that kind of thing, and so I loved it, basking in the glow of a star-struck audience when Springsteen slowed down for "The River" and "I Ca n't Help Falling In Love With You", thrilling spontaneously to the opening bars of "Born To Run", singing and dancing with 71,999 others during the rip-it-up "Twist And Shout" medley.

These, clearly, were responses to circumstance, atmosphere, expectation and almost tangible emotion rather than to what was actually happening on stage half a mile away. To be truthful, I'm still not entirely sure how Bruce Springsteen ever reached this elevated, invincible position of his, how he gained the power to create the sort of pandemonium that, decisively, seduced me at Wembley.

When it comes down to it, Springsteen is simply a guy with a guitar, a pair of jeans, a fairly pleasant line in songwriting, an American flag, and an unspectacular video screen.

I do have my theories about this demigod business: it may be a generalisation, but people do tend to go to extremes when it comes to selecting heroes. They like flash, dramatic, escapist rock, or they like the unaffected boy-next-door who also happens to be a tremendously sensitive soul, forever penning the vague lyrics of life and love that everybody feels they can identify with, and does.

There's a certain homeliness about old Springsteen, the whole romantic image of the all-American smalltown boy who made good, the one who lived through all of our problems and overcame every obstacle to find himself where he is today. Most important, though – he never forgets the good old days. On stage, he sends the proverbial postcard to the folks back home, chatting to the stadium masses about New Jersey, about his dad, about his sister, about his haircut, his marriage, his age... just a regular chap, really. There's hope for us all, Wembley...

Springsteen stands for Good Against Evil, he comforts the conscience of the great moral majority, he reassures, while at the same time titillating his audience with the "dangerous" connotations of his medium, which is rock'n'roll.

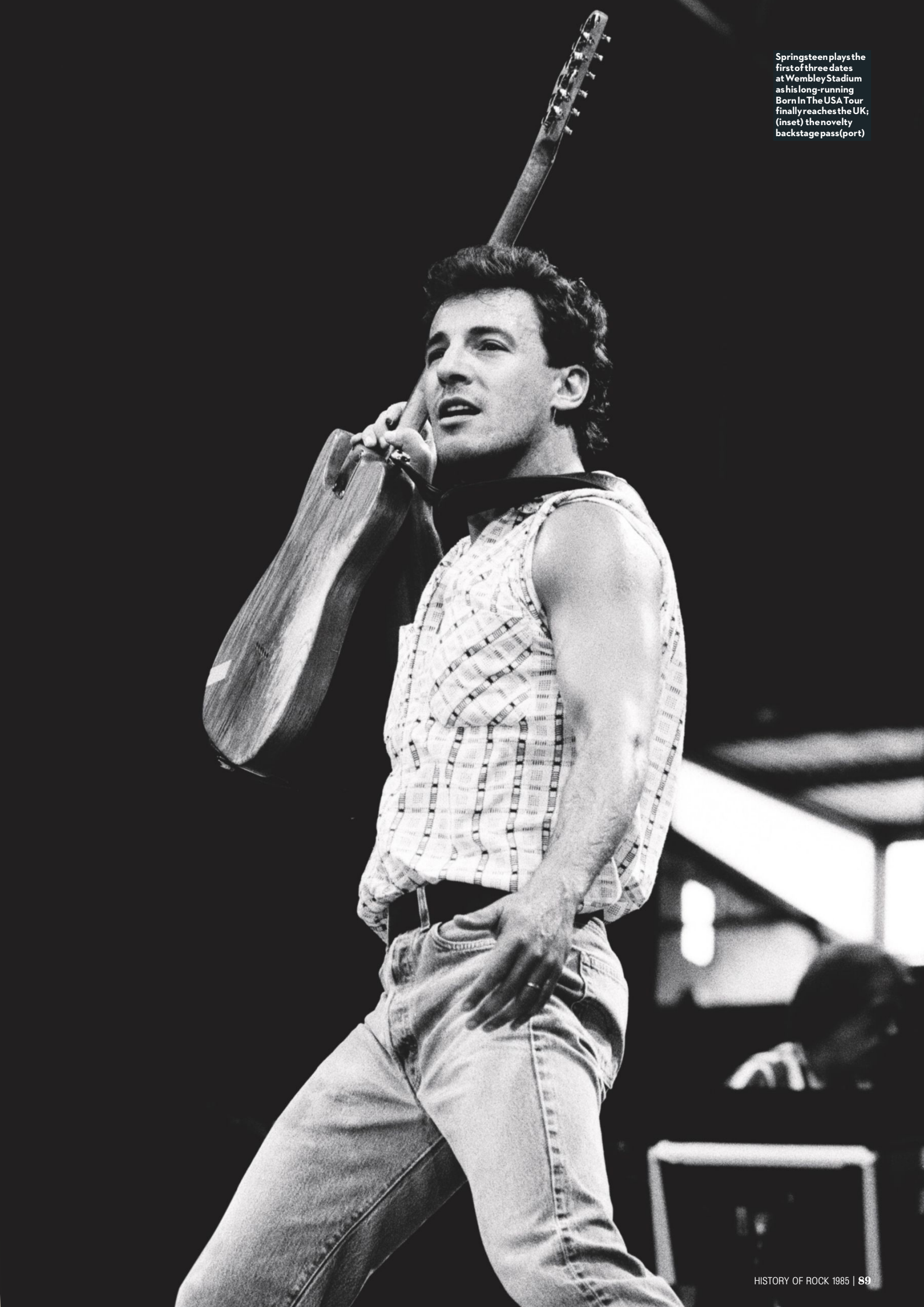
Bruce is as safe as houses, really. And it's an irony, a constant source of bewilderment, that some of the greatest thrills you can find around music today can come from someone who could never be a rebel again if he tried. *Carol Clerk*

BRUCED EGO

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
Wembley Stadium, London

Help Falling In Love With You", thrilling spontaneously to the opening bars of "Born To Run", singing and dancing with

ALAMY



Springsteen plays the first of three dates at Wembley Stadium as his long-running Born In The USA Tour finally reaches the UK; (inset) the novelty backstage pass (port)

"A bit wayward"

Which is ROBERT SMITH's favourite biker magazine? This and more revelations as THE CURE frontman spins tales of raw prawns, The Jesus And Mary Chain, and why you should never measure up for a pool table when you're hungover.

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 17 —

"**NO MORE MAD** Bob."

Pardon?

"No more Mad Bob."

Oh, I see. Robert Smith is happy. Deliriously happy. Think about that. Doctor Doom. Mister Miserable. The Prince Of Paranoia. Happy. Happy with life. Happy with death. Happy to wind us up. Happy to let us down. And happy to talk his head off about *The Head On The Door*, the new Cure album and another departure from what we expect.

So what's he got to tell us, this smudge of lipstick in a lion's mane? Will he spin us a yarn to match the one he foisted on *Smash Hits* – you know, the one about the album title referring to a nightmare childhood vision engendered by a chickenpox fever?

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"Oh, did I tell him that one?" Robert grins sheepishly and attacks an onion bhaji. "Well… it's sort of true. Do you want me to give you a different version?"

Oh, yes please.

"Alright then." (Are you sitting comfortably?) "When I was little, I used »

"I've cut down on my vices – I've only kept drinking" Robert Smith in 1985

to sleep in the same room as my little sister and we used to have one of those Noddyland scenes, quite a big event, made out of felt."

Oh really.

"Look, this is deadly serious. I couldn't make something up like this, now could I? Right. You had all these particular characters who existed in Noddy's particular brand of reality, which is basically Big Ears and his family – hundreds of 'em – oh, and a policeman. That was about it.

"Anyway, my big sister was going to art school at the time and she used to make us toys out of felt, nice things to put in this two-foot window into Noddyland, and my brother got the idea that it would be really good fun to introduce a sort of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* element.

"So there I was, sitting up in my bunkbed before I went to sleep, and suddenly I noticed he'd cut Noddy's head off and it really, really scared me.

"I went really mental – Noddy had such a sweet face, he was always Mr Happy, and I remember thinking at the time that it was a really evil thing to do. Even now it seems pretty awful. Uh… d'you know, the biggest evil I could imagine was Catwoman? Remember they used to have bubblegum cards? Well, I used to have Catwoman under my pillow. I used to think that was pretty dangerous, my first stirrings of lust.

"But cutting Noddy's head off… I was in trauma! And I remember at the same time, Father Christmas arrived in our street on a lorry. What a pile of cack! It destroyed my faith in things like that. Still, I don't suppose people of my generation keep that kind of thing going for their kids. I mean, how can you possibly believe in the tooth fairy with a Conservative government? You don't get something for nothing any more."

"It's a group again": (l–r) Porl Thompson, Robert Smith, Boris Williams, Simon Gallup and Lol Tolhurst on stage in Rotterdam, Nov 27, 1985

ROB VERHORST / GETTY

From De Quincey to Kinnock in a couple of breaths. Good going, Robert. Ramble on.

"Well, there's a lot of references to dreams in my songs. It seems to bother other people, but it's never really worried me that I have vivid dreams. I find it very reassuring. Its not always nice to wake up with your whole body vibrating like an engine – it sometimes takes three minutes to get back to normal – but that's OK."

Does Smith the visionary rise, I wonder, from his bed onto some imaginary psychoanalyst's couch, combing his slumber for secrets and signs?

"No! I think the whole concept of interpreting dreams is the biggest wank, really. Freud's obviously the most well-known exponent of delving into your subconscious and examining it, but the idea that you can have secrets from yourself is such a paradox, it's unreal. I can understand it if you suppress things, but you know, you're suppressing them. The idea of tricking yourself is one of those imponderables – it's impossible. Who are you to trick yourself?

"My dreams are very straightforward, very much like my life. I murder in my dreams, much as I murder in real life. I've always really wanted to kill someone, but it's wearing off now. Y'know, just a casual murder."

I think I understand. I've always thought if I was gonna go crazy, I'd do it creatively, riding in the passenger seat of a monstrously fast car, blasting oncoming cruisers with a shotgun. That way you get the bullet impact and the crash.

"No, no. Much more physical. If you use a gun, you might as well shoot a bird, really. I used to murder a great deal in my dreams – people that I've never even met and who, no doubt, hope I never will. But I wouldn't murder any more, I'm sure of it."

> "I've always wanted to kill someone, but it's wearing off now"

Has this Smith, lately labelled a nouveau hippy because of his beads and baggy bits and pieces, ever hated anyone enough to kill them?

"Oh yeah, of course. I know there's one that if I ever met him, I'd kill him. Every fight I've ever been in, I've thought I'm fighting that person but I've never met him. Not through want of trying."

What on earth did the blackguard do?

"Ah, that's a story that will remain forever secret. He once did something – not actually to me but I always vowed to avenge it. It was quite an awful thing that I witnessed. See, I'm still very moral, I still have the same ethics I always had, but I don't really think that if I did kill someone casually there would be any retribution if I didn't get caught. I'd just like to do it as an experience. I wouldn't like to torture somebody or do anything like that."

I've decided this "No More Mad Bob" business may be a little premature, but I press on regardless, wondering if Smith thinks he'd feel like a different person burdened with the knowledge that he's taken a life?

"Yeah. The sort of thing that always put me off is it's not really the sort of thing you can mend."

And what if you grow to like it?

"Well, there is that. And if you don't like it, you'd probably end up confessing anyway. But it's not that big a step, is it, not really? We're gonna be rotting in 50 years' time anyway, so why not rot now and give someone some pleasure from it? If someone dies naturally, everyone cries. There may as well be someone dancing around the grave – and it may as well be me."

As I said, Robert Smith is happy, even contemplating the inevitable. Can this metamorphosis from gloom to glee be permanent, or just another of his infamous emotional seesaws?

"Well, I'm very aware of my periods of instability and I've tried to think, 'If it's going to happen to me, I may as well use it for some benefit', but last year all it succeeded in doing was getting in the way. I couldn't really do anything at all, whereas now I generally feel much better. I've cut down on my vices – I've only kept drinking; everything else has gone out the window."

Everything?

"Everything."

Isn't that hard?

"No, not at all. I just decided one night. I was doing absolutely nothing, y'know? It got to the point when cleaning your teeth seemed too much bother. It's cack when you get to that stage, so I tried to learn to waterski and things like that – the other extreme. It actually shocked my body back into a happy status quo. I didn't get fit, but at the same time I didn't keel over and spend a month in a rest home, which is what everyone said I should do.

"I thought that idea was bollocks – you know your own body… or you should do. The older you get, the more you know it. I'm afraid I can no longer wake up in the morning and boast that I haven't got a hangover."

Me neither. Never. Wonder how this affects Boy Smith's public image?

"I'd be hard-pressed to imagine what my public image is, to be honest. Indifferent. It varies, actually, from place to place. Here, it's very obvious from the general media myth that's perpetrated – character assassination, that's the phrase I'm after. But in America I'm considered a really radical bloke, a really dangerous person, on the wanted list, because they filter through the more sordid elements from England and they also invent their own… Oh, and also, when I'm in America I misbehave more than I do in England, because it's far away from home.

"In Japan, it's teenybop hysteria. We went mega – on television, arriving at the station. And in New Zealand we're still doom and gloom, so when we go there we only smile behind closed doors."

I think you deserve an update on this schizophrenic Smith character, just to help you make up your own mind. He's writing a book on The Cure in conjunction with a French lady, which, he claims, will be far more honest than anything I could cook up. He speeds around in a four-wheel-drive jeep which his friends consider "a post-nuclear vehicle or what?".

He owns a flat in Maida Vale with a soundproofed bedroom to shield him from the professional musical writer upstairs. He's decided to holiday in London this year to catch up on all the movies he's missed. He saw *Ghostbusters* three times at the Marble Arch ABC, not because he liked the film ("It was cack") but because he enjoyed watching the 300 teenies punch the air during the theme tune – "It reminded me of a David Cassidy concert – not that I ever went to one, you understand, but it's the sort of thing, looking back, that I wish I had done."

He never drinks on planes – "You can't drink on an eight-hour flight, pass out, then go on stage… Well, you can, but then you're Spandau Ballet."

His back garden is a football pitch-cum-dog's toilet – "I haven't plucked up the courage to play in the team yet, but I think, in my current state, I'd probably play a sort of Glenn Hoddle role – fading away for 80 minutes, then a killer 10 minutes before the end."

His band, The Cure, is now a quintet, Simon Gallup, the original bassist, welcomed back into the fold. Robert's ecstatic about this lineup – "It's a group again" – and the pair of them reckon they're pretty hot at pool. In fact, Ex-Mad Bob had a table installed in his flat, a slate bed six-by-three, but he was "a bit mortal" when he measured it up, so the fit was a mite cosy – no room to make shots – and the table now resides at a local youth club.

Smith the sportsman warms to the subject: "Me and Simon, we're known as The Hackers, that's the name of our pool team – as in computer hackers, because we're both Luddites and the rest of the band are very pro whatever's new. Boris and Porl, who reckon they're the best but we »

hammer them, are called the Bros because they both have this fantasy that they're constantly driving about on huge, throbbing motorbikes.

"You ever seen the magazine called *Outlaw Biker*? They're selling it in London now, you've gotta buy it. It's the best magazine ever in the whole history of printed matter – I mean, it's even better than *Melody Maker*! They have photo stories from the West Coast of America and each month they feature the best 'Party 'Til You Puke'. They go to a party and the idea is actually to be the first one to vomit.

"And then they 'Burn The Jap Crap', which means they go out and the first Japanese motorbike they come across, they steal it, drive it off to the party, beat shit out of it and set fire to it. And another thing is called 'Tits And Tats' – Tits is obvious, subtitled 'Show Us Yer Tits', and these women all have breasts which hang down to their knees. And the other one, Tats, is tattoos, which is the other symbol of being a really good bro'.

"There's an alternative English publication called *Easy Rider* which is really inferior, very sedate, like comparing *NME* to *Melody Maker*. The *NME* were really upset because I wouldn't do an interview with them, but I can't believe how boring it is. It's incredible how anyone still buys it. It's pointless talking to them, because all they're gonna do is get someone to do another 'We Hate The Cure And Here's 20 Reasons Why' article.

"The last piece, by Mat Snow, wasn't even funny, it was just badly done. The worst thing is, he ended up sort of liking us – I really failed on that one, but I couldn't approach it with any sort of venom because he's the sort of bloke who inspires boredom. Difficult."

There's more you should know about this Smith and *The Head On The Door*. Like, if this is stretching The Cure, it's by way of a yawn, a relaxed appraisal of the similar swoops and glides into insanity that graced the superb *Top* album. Smith, surprisingly, doesn't hold *The Top* in the same esteem as me. He finds it too slow, too finicky, too him. He prefers *The Head…* because it's more of a group effort, and plans to record another album, even more group-orientated, later this year. *The Head…*, in a way, is a ragbag of songs, almost arbitrary. Together, as a whole, there's no clue, no key to its intended identity, but individually the Japanese-sounding "Kyoto Song", the flamenco-flavoured "The Blood" and the disco-tinged "Close To Me" are as strong and strange as anything The Cure have ever done.

"A lot of what I was writing was really disparate and there was no sense to it at all. It was like one step on from *The Top* in that it sounded like a different person writing all these songs, and I wanted to keep that idea. Looking back, although I didn't think of it at the time, it reminds me of the *Kaleidoscope* [Banshees] album, the idea of having lots of different-sounding things, different colours. I wanted 10 songs that all sounded very different to each other so there was absolutely no logic to it at all.

"I think it's the most entertaining album we've ever done in the sense that it doesn't require very much from the listener for it to be enjoyable, mainly because it's very simple, intentionally simple. It's as much a reaction against us as a reaction against anything else that's going on, because I didn't want to get too precious again.

"I was getting a bit too close to falling into Mad Bob and people were saying that to me, jokingly – mainly inspired by what you wrote about *The Top*, actually. People picked up on what you wrote and decided that I was going mental. Well, for a while I was a bit unstable, but I think it's horrible when people make a career out of being something."

> "I was aware that people thought I was getting too obscure"

What, professional loonies, like professional cockneys?

"Yeah, it's cack. That last thing I wanted to do was drive my jeep into a swimming pool.

"I don't think this record heralds us doing anything. I know I'm supposed to be selling it, but I never see it like that. *Pornography* or *Faith* are peculiar in that quite a lot of people probably think, 'If I could only listen to one album for ever and ever, it would be this album.' But I don't

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Smith unleashed: "We'd reached the end of our contract, and I had this sudden sense of being able to do anything"

think this one's like that, because it doesn't inspire that kind of emotion.

"It's the same as when The Human League brought out *Dare*, I thought it was a really good collection of songs. It didn't send shivers down my spine, but I've got drunk to it and danced to it a lot over the years. Same with this record – I thought it would be nice to do something entertaining. *Japanese Whispers* had the same kind of effect, but that was a collection of singles and I wanted something all new that sets people up so they don't know what's coming next.

"I tried to make this album really obvious, because I was aware that people thought I was getting too obscure for anyone's good. Even the words are obvious, but when I said this to a guy from *Jamming* he laughed and gave me some instances, so I suppose they are still obscure in a way, but they're as plain as I can be. That's why I find most songs in the Top 20 at the moment really boring, because they're like end of conversation, you don't really need to bother.

"Some of the songs are a bit wayward but 'In Between Days' is probably the simplest thing I've written since 'Boys Don't Cry'. I did it on purpose; I thought, 'Right, I might as well prove all those bastards wrong.' I know it's big-headed, but you couldn't really make a record if you didn't think it was good, and there's very few albums that I've listened to this year that people have recommended to me that are comparable.

"Lol told me to listen to New Order's album and I thought, 'This is a really dull record for what they can do.' For me, their record is 100 times safer than ours."

Which brings us to the widespread rumour of larceny. There are those who listen to "In Between Days" and hear only New Order with Smithy whining over the top. There are those who consider The Cure's whole career as a sly regurgitation of others' choice cuts.

"So the single sounds like New Order, what's the problem? As soon as we did it, I knew people would say we ripped them off and I thought, 'Perfect.' It was done very tongue-in-cheek. No, that's not my sort of phrase – tongue-in-wool. It was meant to sound like that. And anyway, on the New Order album, they've ripped off 'A Forest'. They've just slowed it down. Obviously they put it on at the wrong speed, had a little too much to drink and thought, 'That's a good tune.'

"Comparisons between anyone are endless. Depending on where you were and who you were, you could probably compare us to Wham!."

Not unless you're on something damn strong, but still, where did this cheeky new Smith come from?

"It's just me being gloriously happy, probably. After we'd finished touring, I had a sudden surge of thinking that I wouldn't have to do anything forever and ever if I didn't want to because we'd reached the end of our contracts and things like that, and I had this sudden sense of being able to do anything."

SMITH'S NEW SENSE of freedom apparently extends to all matters concerning The Cure, a radical reversal from his involvement with the claustrophobically secretive Banshees. Why, it even extends to videoing the recording of *The Head…*, a home movie of daft drunkenness and corny jokes which he hopes to release soon to "really take the myth apart". The funny thing is, though, despite all this gaiety, Robert's beginning to act as if he's old. He recently told some other hack that he'd always anticipated being dead by 25, but here he is, no grey hairs in sight and fitter than ever.

"I feel old because of what people have been saying to me. I've consciously done interviews with *Just 17* just because it's pap – I mean, it's all pap really, but at least *Melody Maker* are at a higher level of pap than *Just 17*. But anyway, these 17-year-olds are coming along saying, 'Well, as an established band… as a famous…', and eventually it gets to you.

"But I defy all these people to name me someone we are comparably old to. I look at the five of us in a metaphysical mirror and we're still 100 years younger than all these people who are physically younger, because they're so fucking worried about nothing. I mean, when I was young I didn't feel young, but I still feel younger than any new group… except The Jesus And Mary Chain."

> "I proceeded to pick up all my sick and throw it on the floor"

I feel a story coming on.

"The occasion was me being more drunk than I had been all year, my one night out in London clubland. Seriously, I can't risk more than one night out. See, we were doing *Top Of The Pops* and we usually drink loads and loads of vodka in the bar, which explains our frighteningly exciting performances. Then we usually go away somewhere because we're usually so mortal, drinking all afternoon. We go home and die or we just go out for a meal all together and fall asleep in a restaurant, but this time, for some reason, we didn't go to the *Top Of The Pops* bar before we went on and, admittedly, the performance was probably duller than ever.

"So anyway, we went there afterwards, feeling that we had to say hello to the doorman and the barman, because their whole idea of the world would probably crumble around them and they'd develop serious personality disorders the next day if they knew we'd been on the show without visiting them.

"So we went there and we stayed there until we got thrown out, by which time we were pretty hot. So we decide to go to eat, but I had to go to this studio supposedly to do backing vocals on the new single and listen to the brass section – y'know, give 'em the Pope's seal of approval. So we went to the studio and I couldn't even make out what the song was, so I was helped out and we weaved our way mysteriously down to the Sun Luck restaurant, where I then proceeded to eat a washing-up bowl of prawns – heads and feet and tails, y'know – not thinking, talking rapidly and just eating, and then me and Lol staggered outside and someone grabbed hold of Lol and said, 'Excuse me, you're The Cure. My friend wants to meet you, we're drinking in this bar.' Well, the next thing I knew we were descending the steps to this really dingy place and I was thrust in front of William from The Jesus And Mary Chain.

"All these people gathered round expecting a confrontation or something, but actually it ended up that I did a little bit of pogoing – y'know, a bit like [photographer Tom] Sheehan teaching me the frug, same sort of deal, 'This is how we used to do it' – and I ended up throwing up, I think, in the ladies' toilet.

"I was actually being sick in the sink because someone was in the toilet, and someone else came in and said, 'You can't do that, mate, you're blocking up the sink and I want to have a wash', so I then proceeded to pick up all my sick in my hands and throw it on the floor. It was all perfectly formed prawns, it was no problem – in fact, had I picked up my meal initially and thrown it on the floor it would have been the same, but I'd've had a really good night.

"As it was, Lol ended up carrying me home, which is why I know it was my last night out in London, because when you get to the stage when Lawrence puts you in a taxi and takes you home, you're in fucking big trouble."

This same story, of course, appeared in the Daily Maxwell recently, only it claimed Smith had serious food poisoning and there was no mention of the Jesus bunch. I wonder what Smith thought of them?

"Well, Lol bought the first Jesus And Mary Chain single because he bought the first Sex Pistols record and he thought, being a pretty Hindu sort of bloke, that he'd complete the circle and step up a level, so no one would pick on him any more, but I wasn't impressed by it."

What about his contemporaries like Billy Idol?

"'White Wedding', what a load of cack," Smith snarls, and proceeds to relate the rather sordid tale of how The Cure did their last-ever support tour with Generation X only to be unceremoniously dumped halfway through when Lol happened upon Billy trying to get his leg over a nubile in the Gents and offered a helping hand.

"Next day we were told we weren't needed on the rest of the tour, so we dropped Lol off at a motorway service station on the way home."

More tales of exploding cigarettes on planes and fisticuffs with Nina Hagen in Athens and I'm even less convinced by this "No More Mad Bob" business. So come on, Smith, what have you got to say for yourself?

"Well, I think if I was 16 again and I wanted to be in a group, we'd be one of the three groups I'd want to be in – us, the Bunnymen or someone gorgeous' backing band just so I could sit and watch someone's bum for a couple of hours. And as long as I still think that, I'll be happy."

Steve Sutherland ●

"My life is quite extreme"

Visitations from the dead. Migraines. Interpretive dance. All of the above and more have helped form the new KATE BUSH album. "Too many people sit and think, 'It'll just come to me,' instead of getting off their arses and going for it," she says.

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 24 —

"Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life" – Schiller

JUST LIKE THE phoenix, really. Once every two years, she rises out of the ashes to once more bestow a touch of mysticism, a hint of myth, and a copious supply of inspired vision upon the burned-out landscape we call the charts.

She smiles. We shake hands. She's too polite to be a phoenix. Perhaps a Fairy Queen? Tommy [*MM* photographer Tom Sheehan] and I introduce ourselves at the doorway of her dance studio.

"Oh yes, Tom," she beams, "you're looking better than the last time I saw you."

Young Thomas looks flushed. They've only met once before – three years ago, for about five minutes. Perhaps she does remember?

"Oh yes, and I've met you before, as well," she smiles.

I try to explain this is not the case. Mistaken identity, perhaps? I'm damn sure I'd remember. But she's adamant.

"Perhaps it was in another life," cries a whimsical voice from the room behind.

"Yes," she stares at me, considering the matter thoroughly. "It must have been in another life."

Oh dearie me. She is serious. She is incredibly cordial. She is unbelievably beautiful. Over the past two years, the name Kate Bush has once more receded to the back of the common consciousness, joining the smouldering ember of the Buzzcocks et al – set for the scrapyard. Yet once more she has confounded the rumour-mongers who had already pronounced her the Lady Lucan of pop, missing presumed dead. Once more she has created an album to besot and bewitch the coldest of hearts. Once more she has come out of her isolated refuge with the charm of a siren and the innocence of a child. Ms Bush is incapable of growing old, she has merely grown up.

But what, you ask, has sister Kate been doing during this hiatus, this self-imposed exile? As usual, Kate explains much, but reveals precious little, slamming the doors of privacy with a single coy look.

"After the last album, I had to promote it, and that took me to the end of '82, so it hasn't really »

Kate Bush in 1985: "All I ever do is listen to the little voices inside me... You can't disappoint them"

been that long. My life is quite extreme, really; I go from a very isolated working situation, to going out and promoting my work and being very much a public creature.

"After you've been through months of that kind of overexposure, you're left feeling a bit shellshocked. I needed to take some time off and go somewhere quite different to write this new album. I didn't want to produce it in the wake of *The Dreaming*."

A wise move. Music vogues move with such alacrity that two years off can finish off a career. In fact, such a timespan is the beginning and the end of most groups' lifespans!

"I didn't really bother thinking about that sort of thing. I spent the time seeing films, seeing friends, building my own studio, and doing things I hadn't had a chance to do for ages."

Things? You couldn't elaborate on what these strange and wondrous things would be? Trout fishing? Hang-gliding? Hamster hunting?

"I found an inspirational new dance teacher," Kate replies with growing enthusiasm. "The teacher's energy made me really enthusiastic about writing again."

And once again the conversation turns back to the studio. Kate talks about her beloved studio a great deal – a great deal more than she's willing to chat about herself. She really doesn't have any hobbies, mainly because they wouldn't be beneficial to her work – the subject around which her entire universe evolves. The one exception is an avid interest in archery. And even this she has turned toward work, with the cover shot of the new single, believing it to be symbolic of Cupid's bow – an image that ties the threads of the single together.

And so, naturally, we turn to Kate's new album, *Hounds Of Love*, and the current success of the new single. Another new departure? Another rebirth? Another quest for new pastures?

"Yes, I wanted something new, and to begin with, it was extremely difficult. All the songs I seemed to write sounded too much like the last album. I've never seen any point in repeating things you've already done before. I think it's a dangerous thing not to search for new ways of approaching songs. Too many people sit and think, 'It'll just come to me,' instead of getting off their arses and going for it."

Kate, of course, is far too polite to name names…

"If you get out and go for things, then those things will come to you. I think it's too easy to wait and expect things just to come to you."

A certain Mrs M Thatcher said similar words, but this time they ring with verity. Must be her smile. Kate's new studio, hidden away in the overgrown wilds of Kent, enables her to exorcise the ghosts of *The Dreaming* without sending EMI executives into prolonged thromboses over the expense of the operation.

"The pressure of knowing the astronomical amount that studio time costs used to make me really nervous about being too creative. You can't experiment forever, and I work very, very slowly. I feel a lot more relaxed emotionally now that I have my own place to work and a home to go to."

Sitting on floor cushions, drinking cups of tea, I can't help thinking if things got any more relaxed, they'd be sound asleep. Speak more of the new material, Kate. Speak words of love…

"This time I wrote a lot of songs and just chose the best ones to put on the A-side of the album. I like to think there's not a song there that's been put there for padding. Sometimes people get the impression that if you take a long time over something that you're literally going over the same piece again and again, and instead of making it better, you're making it worse. I hate to think I've ever done that."

This striving for perfection might well be caused by fears about disappointing her audience or her pet cats. The longer the wait, the greater the expectation.

"There are always so many voices telling me what to do that you can't listen to them. All I ever do is listen to the little voices inside me. I don't want to disappoint the little voices that have been so good to me."

Of course not. The finely tuned songs that made the final selection on the album differ greatly from the diversions of previous albums. They are all love songs (sigh) using elemental imagery that form a cogent and cohesive panoply of emotion. A search and struggle to secure some sort of meaning. The discovery that

ALBUMS REVIEW 1985

Them heavy rhythms

MM SEPT 21 The one where Kate goes conceptual.

Kate Bush Hounds of Love EMI

Critics – and, I suspect, a large proportion of her fiercely devoted following – seem consistently unable to explain the elusive appeal of Kate Bush. How can someone so charming and giggly and apparently straightforward get to write a song as complex and mystical as "The Dreaming"; or as blatantly sexual as "Breathing"; or as evocatively surreal as "Babooshka"?

The question is: is she 10 years ahead of her time, or 10 years behind it? Whatever…she's way out of sync with anything else that's going down right now – and that's probably not a bad thing. It's just a shame that, because she's so eminently marketable, her often radical experiments with percussive rhythms, startling melody lines, ambiguous lyrics and eccentric vocals haven't earned the credit they've deserved. Eurythmics for one have surely come under her influence.

This is her fifth album and, we are told, the second side of it – subtitled "The Ninth Wave" – is a concept. I can hear the shudders from here. But then virtually everything Kate has ever done has seemed like a mini-concept album… all those dramatic atmospherics and cinematic lyrics. She has as much in common with opera as she does with conventional pop music.

This said, I don't much care for "The Ninth Wave" as an idea. Full of hippy talk and religious theory, it purports to tell the story of someone skating on thin ice who promptly gets trapped beneath that ice, with all the panic and psychological trauma such an experience would entail. But, of course, it's actually about much more than that as the tracks flow into a blurred metaphysical overview of the meaning of life, bringing in themes of magic, death, spiritual existence and – ultimately, on the jaunty closing track "The Morning Fog" – reincarnation.

However, it does include one brilliant extract, "Jig Of Life", which gives full vent to her interest in traditional themes and her Irish background (with John Sheahan playing some blazing, earthy fiddle, and driven along by uilleann piper Liam O'Flynn).

But the theme is too confused and the execution too laborious and stilted to carry real weight as a complete entity.

Some of the central obsessions of "The Ninth Wave" also crop up on the other "non-concept" side. A deal with God, for example, is struck on "Running Up That Hill", the hit single. It's the most telling line on the album – everyone has made a deal with God sometime – and its exotic nature makes it instantly more arresting than the disconcerting admission of fear and faint hearts on "Hounds Of Love" or the whimsical meandering of "The Big Sky".

"Hounds Of Love" is, though, far and away the best track on the album… rich and colourful, it successfully overcomes the disco rhythms that otherwise tend to overbalance the album, and inspires Kate to a truly astonishing vocal performance.

The biggest plus of the album is, in fact, her singing: she squawked and shrieked her way through *The Kick Inside* and *Lionheart* and even on *Never For Ever* (surely her greatest work) there were moments when hysteria got the better of her.

Here she has learned you can have control without sacrificing passion, and it's the heavyweight rhythm department aided and abetted by some overly fussy arrangements that get the better of her. And a pox on the concept album. *Colin Irwin*

although you can strip away everything from a person, there will always be a residue of love awaiting resurrection. Sounds mawkish, doesn't it? Jane Austen world have loved it. All those over-expressive vocals and delicate orchestrations channelled into such pathos. Sounds risible, doesn't it?

Yet the songs' style and eloquence rise above bathos through their haunting overtones. Phantasmagorical voices tilt the rose-coloured world off its trite axis with jagged eerie phrases. Outside observations are slanted metaphors revealing states of mind. No longer are we presented with the eclectic collage of *The Dreaming*, whose continual shifts and spirals allowed an escape with diversity. No longer is the entire story of Houdini crammed into three minutes, until a new fable takes up the torch. Now the texture is more subtle, the production more adroit, and the mesmerism unrelenting.

"The last album contained a lot of different energies. It did take people to lots of different places very quickly, and some people found that difficult to take. I think this album has more of a positive energy. It's a great deal more optimistic.

"I rather think of the album as two separate sides." How *astute*. "The A-side is really called 'Hounds Of Love', and the B-side is called 'The Ninth Wave'. The B-side is a story, and that took a lot more work – it couldn't be longer than half an hour, and it had to flow. This time, when you get to the end of one track, what happens after it is very affected by what's come before. It's really difficult to work out the dynamics within seven tracks. The concept took a long time."

Whoops! There goes that word again. Concept – a word mauled by the memory of Floyd, flares, baked lentils and chronic boredom. It took some time to extract my nails from the ceiling and climb back down to earth. It took even longer to summon up the courage to ask what this concept might entail. Kate looks upset that I'm not jumping up and down with ecstasy.

"It's about someone who comes off a ship and they've been in the water all night by themselves, and it's about that person re-evaluating their life from a point which they've never been to before. It's about waking up from things and being reborn – going through something and coming out the other side very different."

Sounds suspiciously like *The Ancient Mariner* revisited…

"Oh no! It's completely different. It ends really positively – as things always should, if you have control."

And Kate certainly has that. From the writing, recording, performing, production of her tunes to the choreography on the accompanying video. As usual, the visual imagery is gleaned from a wide variety of sources: from the films of Godard, Herzog and Coppola, to *The Book Of Dreams*, yet their accretion with Kate's own personal fears and desires is shrouded in mystery.

"There are many films that you don't think much of at the time, but weeks afterwards you get flashbacks of images. Sometimes films like *Don't Look Now* and *Kagemusha* have really haunted me. You don't necessarily steal images from films, but they are very potent and take you somewhere else – somewhere impossible to get to without that spark."

At this moment it is difficult to see how such a placid, genteel and downright normal musician could ever produce songs like "Get Out Of My House" and "Sat In Your Lap". Perhaps some strange transformation takes place when she is asleep?

"Yes, I have very strange dreams, you know. Over the years I've collected the most incredible star cast of them. Very famous people come and visit me."

Curiouser and curiouser…

"Peter O'Toole came round to dinner last week, and my mum met him and thought he was wonderful. Keith Moon often comes round for tea, as well. I have a lot of vivid dreams, most of which I can't mention. The images I get from them sometimes bleed into my songs."

Most of Kate's heroes, like Oscar Wilde, the Pythons, Roxy Music, Billie Holiday and Hitchcock, have all visited her, but her mum didn't like Hitchcock – maybe she was just frightened by him?

"Hitchcock was definitely a genius. His dreams must have been extraordinary. He must have plucked his ideas out of the sky, or had a private line to Mars."

Slowly, very slowly, we're edging closer to the point where the musician and her music bisect.

"I think some people use music as a means of expressing what they feel about things which they can't express socially. I don't really know why people think my songs are strange. Perhaps because I bathe in goat's milk! It's not something you should really ask me. My mum could probably help you more. It's probably something to do with my childhood."

> "I have strange dreams. Very famous people come and visit me"

I met Kate's mum in one of her dreams last Tuesday, but she didn't tell me much either. The door slams shut again. Perhaps a choice of character from the scrolls of history might reveal more.

"I would want to be Breughel, definitely."

Things are starting to come into focus. Only a fool would have predicted Florence Nightingale – and Kate is nobody's fool.

"His work is so real, and yet depicted in a fantastic way. It's so beautiful and elemental. And his faces are so haunting."

Things seemed to be going well – very well – until quite suddenly, just as Kate was recounting her favourite fairy tales, she comes over all unnecessary. Lights flash, Kate wilts, and her world starts to spin in the opposite direction to everyone else's.

"I'm terribly sorry about this, but I keep feeling worse and worse, and I don't know whether I can talk properly any more."

Her companion calls it overwork, the doctor calls it a severe migraine. We call it a day.

"I don't know what's come over me," she says, embarrassed. We shake hands. She smiles. "I'm sure we'll see each other again very soon."

Yes, Kate, I sure hope we will. Probably in another life. We exited, floating through the nearest wall. *Ted Mico* •

August 22, 1985: performing "Running Up That Hill" on *Top Of The Pops*

ALAMY

"We're not like anybody else"

From Scotland, divisively: THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN. "We're not like any other group," says singer Jim Reid. "We don't fit in with anybody and we don't fit in with any particular scene. We're not particularly liked by anybody either."

— NME SEPTEMBER 14 —

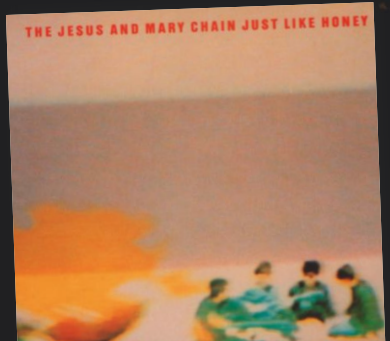
The background
Or: it's no use using Clearasil on an immaculate conception

J: *What's there to do tonight?*
W: *Watch the cracks break out on the ceiling of our neatly custom-built dwelling, get chased around the concrete by the local tuffs like last night, or hatch the plans for a radical new pop noise.*
J: *Lemme think about it.*

JIM REID WOKE up one morning to discover a small swelling on his head. Thinking nothing of it, he went about his normal business, which consisted mainly of finding ways to waste his time. There never seemed to be much to do with time in East Kilbride. Time and the dismal little newtown seemed to have left one another pretty much alone since its cluster of concrete had erupted on the Clydeside landscape.

Jim looked at the swelling with mild annoyance. "Give it time," he thought. After all, there wasn't much else to do with it. But instead of easing, the swelling grew larger and more unsightly. Now, acne he could cope with – that he'd always regarded as something sent to plague him – but Job he wasn't. With increasing irritation he watched the swelling grow from the size of a large pimple to the size of a small orange. »

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD / GETTY



Delivering an "awesome thrill of a noise": brothers William (left) and Jim Reid of The Jesus And Mary Chain in 1985

Then something strange happened. Jim didn't know quite what it was, but he began to become attached to the ever-plumpening swelling, even rather fond of it. After all, he'd never gone out much, so the fact that he was now housebound was a mere minor inconvenience. He nurtured it carefully as it grew to the size of his head. Then one day the swelling burst and, lo and behold, The Jesus And Mary Chain were upon us.

And we, in turn, have waited ever since for The Jesus And Mary Chain to go away. There must have been many of us who thought, when the first hysterical hosannas appeared in the Live pages of *NME*, that we were just being palmed off with another set of cut-price prophets (or would-be profits). A fairly dismal early live show did little to convince me not to kick against the pricks.

Then I heard the record. "Upside Down" wasn't a blinding revelation, but amidst the terminal politeness of the English music scene, it passed for noise immaculate. A quick flash, perhaps, to be followed by a fast gush and a long flush. "Never Understand" proved they weren't so easily disposable, as it showed them crashing onwards, riding a wave of adolescent irresponsibility and irresistible melody, casting up an exhilarating spray of sound. Jim Reid might claim that surf songs "bug the fuck" out of him, but it sounded to me like The Beach Boys cut with the Buzzcocks' more experimental moments. Whatever, it was The Jesus And Mary Chain in excelsis. They were not going to go away.

"You Trip Me Up" flicked off the fake sunburst and left them in the sinister shiver of a Silver Surfer frame. Conventional wisdom branded it a formula follow-up, but it glints with a hundred subtleties. Listen carefully and you can hear the echo of Suicide's "Ghost Rider" hero riding off in the distance, look deeply into the whirlpool of noise and you'll find a razored melody lurking just below the surface. Then, just as you're not expecting it, SLAP! Another wave rears up from behind the guitar and sends a shock of reverberating chopping around the sound.

Now, dodging the predictable once more, they come up with "Just Like Honey", just the sweetest pop ballad of the year – a chiming cascade of guitars around a breathless, fragile vocal – an acoustic guitar version on the 12-inch. "Sell out!" chorus the visionless in their quaint, nostalgic little way. In fact, rather than sounding like a strained ploy, "Just Like Honey" sounds graceful and incredibly natural. It's not until the B-side, "Head", that you realise it harbours their most psychotic moment yet.

The Jesus And Mary Chain are not going to return from whence they came. Which was… well, nowhere.

"At one time I used to say it didn't matter where we came from," says Jim, talking quietly with definite emphasis, "but thinking about it now, I realise that a lot of what is good about us is that we were so isolated from everything. Me and William just spent the last few years just doing nothing. The only thing we ever did was to write songs, make demos and basically get the idea of this group together.

"So many people have been in so many groups that they become kind of tainted; they become part of the music business, even if they've only been in five shitty groups that have played like 50 gigs. Even though we've been around for over a year now, we're still totally isolated from the music business. We're not like anybody else, we're not like any other group. We don't fit in with anybody and we don't fit in with any particular scene. We're not particularly liked by anybody either."

All that time, in the minds of two very slightly paranoid brothers in East Kilbride (ie, nowhere), pop music was slowly mutating.

The image
Or: they'll be looking black and crumpled when they come

J: *Is there one rule about style?*
W: *Only that Paul Weller doesn't have it.*

ABOUT THIS TIME last year, the first, fairly restrained Live review of The Jesus And Mary Chain appeared in the *NME*, squashed onto the third page of the section. The cover of that issue proclaimed "War On Pop".

A year later, if anyone is prepared to take on the challenge of reactivating pop as war it's the two creased characters who sit in front of me primping their oversized haircuts. William and Jim Reid do not look like pop idols (this is one of their advantages), but they do have an instinctive grasp of the power of the pop image to cut you dead.

It's a much documented feature of this age of MTV that music has become increasingly masked by the visual image. This, as a principle, is not too bad – after all, think what it was that meant the most to you, the way Mick Ronson played the guitar, or the zig-zag line on David Bowie's face. What is so sad is just how thin on the screen so many of the images are. As Siouxsie Sioux says (and it takes an icon to know an icon), "I feel sorry for today's kids. Imagine your hero being Nik Kershaw!"

Let's face it, no matter how many Julie Burchill columns you've read, it's hard to pretend that there's anything exciting about Nik Kershaw or Simon Le Bon. Success, contrary to current belief, is not stardom, and no matter how much money Simon Le Bon might sink into the trappings, he is not a star. All he has is an image of young wealth, blueprinted straight from the bankrupt imaginations of the *Penthouse* creative department.

He can cause a stir at the yacht club by inviting two women into his bedroom, he can be painted in newsprint as a drug-crazed tearaway, but he'll never have what Nic Roeg in *Performance* calls "that freaky little demon" or what Lorca calls *duende*.

At the opposite end of the guilt spectrum, if not the wealth spectrum, there's Paul Weller, who treats style just like Le Bon treats sex – he reckons if he broadcasts enough he'll kid us on he's got it. Unfortunately with style, as with sex, if you scream "I got it" the riposte is inevitably, "No you ain't!"

> "If we could get that noise out of an oboe or a clarinet, we would do"

Both polarities have something in common – you only have to look at the poster, catch a clip of the video, they just cry out at you. Listen:

DURAN DURAN: "We've got more money than taste!"

STYLE COUNCIL: "We're as dull and small-minded as a Southern satellite town."

In the midst of all this, The Jesus And Mary Chain look like gallantly unfashionable, mean-faced, bright-eyed brats from the backwaters. "Just fuckin' listen tae this," they say and they deliver this awesome thrill of a noise. That's what I call war.

Take their performance on *Whistle Test*. On that showcase for the "broad spectrum of modern rock" (excuse me while I overdose on Ovaltine), you might have expected a display of the kind of petulant antics they're famed for live. Instead, they appeared bloodshot in red light and crackled across the screen with a measured menace. At the end, instead of the tedious instrument-trashing demonstration, they juddered into a finale of gleeful indifference. Perfect.

Then there was the sleeve of "You Trip Me Up" – a guitar distorted by the horizontal grain of the video image. Nothing spectacular, just the exact visual echo of their technological reinvention of the elementary excitement of rock'n'roll. Just exactly right.

"Exactly," says Jim, "that's why we belong in the Top 10, because everything we do is with extreme taste.

"I know it sounds like a complete cliche to say, but I've always been a big Velvet Underground fan, and the effect I want to have on people is the effect that it has on me looking at pictures of Lou Reed, John Cale and Sterling Morrison in 1966. The photographs of them in Andy Warhol's Factory just contain everything that made their music so awesome. That's what we're trying to do – our words, our music, our photographs. It should all be the one thing."

The music

J: *What do you think of trash aesthetics?*
W: *Sound like a good slogan.*

"PEOPLE FIND IT difficult to get over the idea that we put feedback on records as a main instrument. Too many people just concentrate on that and they don't realise that there's more to it than that. There's other things on our records other than feedback – there's melodies, there's songs, there's words, above all there's noises from a guitar that I just didn't think were possible until he started making these strange sounds in the studio.

"People just don't seem to see the value of what we're doing with guitars, just how different it is." Jim finishes his testament to his brother's genius. William looks sheepish under his pile of hair.

Feedback itself plays a little part in what I've heard of the JAMC LP; it's more a matter of sheer, orchestrated noise around the electrical conductor of the pop dynamic. I discovered its wonders while waiting to board a plane, to join the band in Edinburgh.

October 11, 1985: appearing on *The Tube*

Standing on the tarmac at the foot of the boarding steps, I turned the volume up full on my Walkman. Guitars billowed around my ears, planes took off over my head. It was hard telling which was which, but what the hell, both of them have about the same adrenal effect, and the vocals manage just about to ride the energy.

The way in which The Jesus And Mary Chain use the guitar it may as well be a synthesizer or a road-drill; they have more in common with Kraftwerk than they do with Bruce Springsteen.

"The actual fact that we use guitars is actually quite unimportant," says Jim, "we just happen to be familiar with them, just because they're the obvious things to use when you start making music. If we could get that same noise out of an oboe, we would do. If we could get it out of a clarinet, we would.

"Our music is probably more classical than anything else," claims Jim, bringing us to another important point in the appeal of The Jesus And Mary Chain – ambition. The old truism still holds that if you aim for trash you'll end up with garbage. The Jesus And Mary Chain, meanwhile, aim to make three-minute Wagnerian epics and end up with classic comic-strip culture. With their lurid sound and snatches of imagery, their songs come the closest yet to capturing the morbid fascination of an EC Comic frame, the tacky gut-bursting splurge appeal of Cronenberg.

"If we'd been around in 1966 we might have been a trash group," says Jim, "but nowadays the whole idea is totally outdated, it's just been ruined by a whole bunch of idiots. Now the idea of trash strikes you as something not too serious. We are serious."

Of course you have to be.

"Trash is like a cheap and nasty sound," adds William, "ours is about as classy as you can get really. Listen to the sort of noise that the TV Personalities get, that's cheap and nasty; ours is actually a very carefully crafted sound."

It takes care and attention to sound cheap and nasty with class. It also takes attention to violence to capture anything of the best of the psychedelic era. Where others have indulged in hapless sanctification of the past, TJAMC realise that the value of The Doors, or the early Seeds lay in the way the future seeped through their sound.

"A lot of what happened in the psychedelic time was actually worthwhile," says William, "but what people don't realise is that if those people were around today they probably wouldn't be playing with guitars anyway, they'd be messing around with road drills and things like that. They'd all be fuckin' psychotic bastards.

"I hate groups like The Fuzztones who, just like you say, are trying to take what was then and put it now. I despise nostalgia, basically."

"I despise it as well," says Jim, "there's nothing wrong with taking some of the good bits of what's gone before. Like we have been influenced by The Velvet Underground, and I would say it shows but it's not transparent."

What is transparent is the difference between the bands who've picked on the Velvets because the chords are easy (Flesh For Lulu, The Pastels, and a hundred others it's best to forget) and the ones who've caught *White Light/White Heat* like a viral infection (Fire Engines, Josef K, Sonic Youth).

"When they started they just wanted to be The Kinks or The Who, but what came out was totally awesome and utterly original," says William. "Hopefully we sound as different to them as they do to their original sources."

We come to pay tribute to another mutation.

The spectacle

W: *Is it raining?*
J: *I think they're spitting at us.*
AS I ARRIVE at the Edinburgh gig Jim Reid points across the dressing room as a gesture of recognition. Following his finger, with some apparent difficulty, he staggers across in my direction. There's a genial and celebratory mood in the cramped room, fans are hammering at the door. "This is my wee sister," announces Jim, dragging over a reluctant, pale-faced young girl. "What's that?!"

The questing finger is pointed vaguely in the direction of the quarter bottle I usually carry for such occasions. Brandy. Want some?

Taking me up on the offer, Reid pours half of it into his can of Foster's, then brands me as the "only fuckin' alcoholic in the room. Honestly," he continues, "I never drink spirits. Vodka and orange is my top whack."

Before long he's having extreme difficulty standing up. "Do you know what," he announces in a gurgle of laughter, "I've just discovered that the whole music business is shit, and the only ones who are any good are my mates." He gives in to the increasingly unpredictable forces of gravity and lands on a pile of boxes in the corner.

"You alright?" enquires manager Alan McGee. He's met with an extended gurgle.

Once on stage, Reid renews his struggle with gravity. McGee stands at the back and assumes a catching position every time Jim sways near. The set is customarily short and messy. Out of about four songs at least two are "You Trip Me Up". The audience don't seem too concerned.

Watching Reid roll around the floor and the audience hurling abuse, it sinks in at last. The audience don't want or expect The Jesus And Mary Chain to be "good" live. What they expect is an antidote to mind-numbing competence. To them the band are a spectacle; to the band the audience are a bunch of punk nostalgics. It's a relationship based firmly on mutual contempt.

"Why should I mind that they're too drunk to play?" an apparently well-pleased fan asks. "After all, I'm too drunk to listen anyway."

The context

W: *Ever have an identity crisis?*
J: *Only when I look at my scrapbook.*
ACCORDING TO THE intolerably smug Max Bell in *The Face*, people like me are supposed to look at The Jesus And Mary Chain and say, "Love the music, hate the attitude." Actually, I love the music, love the attitude but think some of the antics are pretty stupid.

"I would agree with you," says Jim.

"But most of the antics you're talking about," William adds, "are confined to the first two months, our first two months of fame when we were making a lot of mistakes, doing things for the sake of publicity."

"It was totally exaggerated as well. Like we did one interview with a music paper and they're goin', 'D'you want beer and whisky?' and we're goin', 'Nuh.' So we're sittin' there with tea and scones, because that's what we felt like that day. Then you read the article and its like they've had a visitation from a posse of Russ Abbot characters."

"Like I might get drunk and go on stage," Jim says, "but that's because I think it's probably more interesting for the audience to see me rolling around the floor than it is to see some polished pop show. That doesn't mean I'm not to be taken seriously or regarded as some stupid young drunk, because I'm not drunk, I'm not stupid and I'm not particularly young either."

The X off

J: *Sometimes you wake up in the morning and you could give a smart answer to any question.*
W: *Other times you're a stupid bastard.*
"I HAVE A terrible fear of being misunderstood, and maybe it is paranoia, but I get the impression that our group has been completely misunderstood. It does have a lot to do with our own naivety, because we created a stupid image which we're finding it very hard to get rid of.

"But when I do an interview I want to describe everything that the band are doing, everything that we're trying to be, but there are no easy words."

Don Watson ●

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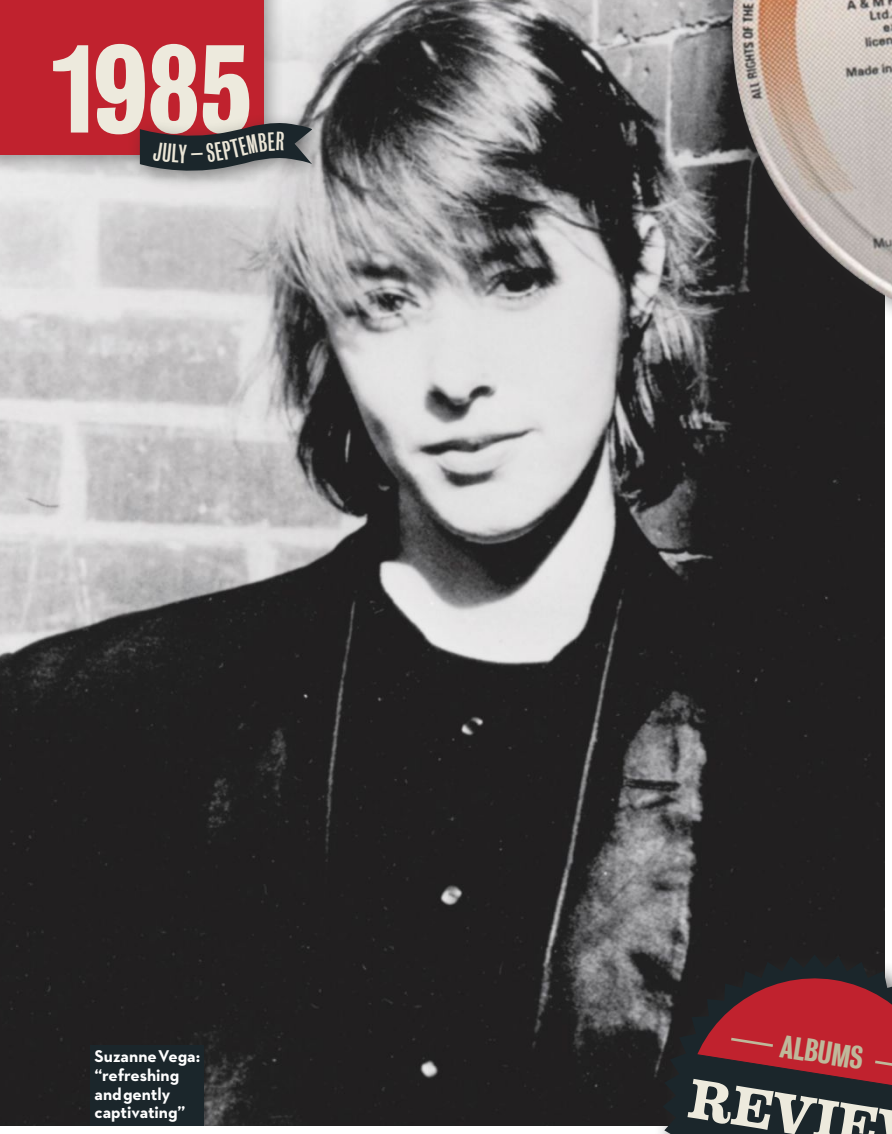


Suzanne Vega: "refreshing and gently captivating"

ALBUMS REVIEW 1985

ALBUMS

Suzanne Vega Suzanne Vega A&M

The *New York Times* has called her "potentially one of the most powerful poet singers since Bob Dylan", and "one of the most promising young talents on the folk music circuit". The *Boston Herald* claims she is "an absolutely original talent, a mesmerising performer".

The lady is Suzanne Vega, and though the accolades are somewhat overblown, there's no doubt that her work is both refreshing and gently captivating. Vega belongs with the traditional folk-poet adventurers and she couldn't object to comparisons with Joni Mitchell, Rickie Lee Jones and Janis Ian, but like Laurie Anderson, she takes traditional forms and updates their structures into something very personal and just a little different.

Until recently she was playing only the New York folk clubs, reviving the arty Greenwich Village singer-songwriter heritage that blossomed to its heyday in the '60s and early '70s. Is there still a place for this gentle, reflective melody that couples wistful lyricism and sweet acoustics? Are Vega's poignant meanderings merely the indulgent progeny of an egocentric and arty form of self-expression?

Unlike Anderson, she shies away from avant-garde distortion. Her songs are straight and pure and true to strict folk construction, yet synthesizers and electric guitar merge with her acoustics without seeming incongruous, and with one or two of the tracks (notably "Neighbourhood Girls") she lapses into a rapping freestyle that's most attractive.

Vega studied dance at NYC's High School Of Performing Arts and cleaves to the NYC "Art" syndrome that claims all forms of personal expression as the only laudable product of human existence. If you're not expressing or projecting then you're not part of the clique.

But I like this record and damn pretentious theorising or criticism. I like it for the same reasons I'd stick by Rickie Lee Jones. It's comforting, warm and intrinsically female... rural values seen through urban eyes, sad, broody and wise. "Knight Moves" and "Neighbourhood Girls" are classics of the genre, "The Queen And The Soldier" is more than a soundtracked poem; it's folklore and fable and highly endearing.

"It's not as romantic, pastoral or escapist as the old folk music was," she claims by way of explanation. "I grew up in tough New York neighbourhoods where what you see is harder and colder than the things you'd see in the country. A lot of my imagery is about confronting, not escaping."

Produced by Lenny Kaye, ex-Patti Smith guitarist, the record will no doubt be seen as a masterpiece by New York's cognoscenti and relatively ignored by everyone else. Which is a pity; Suzanne Vega is quite a talent, and if you're prone to this kind of thing, this record is an unexpected find.

Helen Fitzgerald, MM Aug 3

The Pogues Rum, Sodomy & The Lash STIFF

In which the evilly-leering Pogues stroll off with far and away the best album title of the year and raise several (im)pertinent questions about pop, rock and what (if anything) it all means to us any more. Why, after 30 years of rock'n'roll, are we now listening to Irish pub-rock? Why is folk music suddenly more acceptable than synth-pop and the Batcave?

Perusing Stiff's admirable press handout, I note that many nimble minds have already applied themselves to the naming of The Pogues' music. They "were never meant for anything as delicate as stereo equipment", according to one of the *Maker*'s shock-elite. "The Dubliners on speed," observed the *Irish Times* superbly. Perhaps, fuelled on Jameson's, I'd have more time for the leery accordion-and-banjo sway of "The Old Main Drag" or work up a bit more enthusiasm for the tediously energetic "Sally MacLennane". The other-ranks' tale of "The Gentleman Soldier" (trad arr The Pogues) also sounds like little more than a caricature of folk music.

But the brightest, most intense moments of *Rum...* aren't about particularities of style or delivery. This is, apart from anything else, music to hang on to other people by to stave off brutal fact and the weight of history.

While The Pogues make music for drunks as well, probably, as anyone has (even if they sounded dismally under-powered aboard HMS Belfast the other night), they're also dragging an often-ignored folk tradition into the daylight with an altogether improbable potency.

Thus, "Navigator" is a slow, resolute march depicting the grimy fate of the navvies who died building railways and canals to make "way for a commerce where vast fortunes were made". If, like the album title and the sleeve shots of The Pogues dressed as seafaring personnel of the Napoleonic Wars, "Navigator" flashes back to a brutal paternalist economy which swept its debris under the imperial carpet, next up is "Billy's Bones", a brand-new traditional song about a hooligan who ran from the law to the Middle East and got blown away for his trouble. Still, "*he liked a bloody good fight of course*", which is what he got. So, who cares? Just his poor old mum.

I can tire quite quickly of some of The Pogues' lachrymose balladry, and I daresay these are songs which, more often than not, sound better on the night. A cheer, none the less, for Dick Cuthell's excellent horns and some poignant forays

on the uilleann pipes for Tommy Keane. And, finally, The Pogues take their leave with the slow, anguished lamentations of Eric Bogle's "Waltzing Matilda", the ghastly saga of the young Australians killed and maimed fighting the Turks at Gallipoli. (Inspiration for Peter Weir's film, perhaps?)

With *The War Game* belatedly on TV even while the government is leaning shamelessly on the BBC over Irish politics, it's important that there should be music aware of history and able to throw clear light on the present. "Rum..." has soul, if not a great deal of innovation, and somewhere among the glasses and the ashtrays lie a few home truths. Your round.

Adam Sweeting, MM Aug 10

Propaganda A Secret Wish ZTT

Propaganda: manipulating information for the benefit of your own ideas.

Propaganda in this case are four technocrats in love with imagination. Their songs are a reconciliatory exploration of ideas in change; the music follows finely honed patterns of structure while their literary pathos pursues new forms of beauty: they want the best of both worlds.

Like magpies they steal quotations from Edgar Allan Poe, Roland Barthes and a host of other literary figures. The inner sleeve's "Compositions Illuminated" provides neat little quotations to explain the "essence" of each song. Propaganda enjoy being cryptic and leading a merry dance on their philosophical travels as though they enjoy scattering ideas more than trying to make something of them. Dissemination before collation, they have their priorities well considered.

A Secret Wish is produced by Steve Lipson, who engineered the Frankie album, and features the additional participation of Trevor Horn, David Sylvian, Paul Haig, Malcolm Ross and Glenn Gregory among others. Anton Corbijn took the tasteful photos and the singer's husband, Paul Morley, wrapped the entire collective in a "concept". Nepotism? But of course.

Their music is sexual and active, sublimation through the dynamics of emotion. "Dream Within A Dream" opens the album with luxurious attraction – Propaganda can make complex constructions seem simple and this is the source of their appeal.

"The Murder Of Love" is the only displeasing track, hovering dangerously close to Duran Duran in the special-effects department. Just as DD were carried away by Mad Max and James Bond, Propaganda have tarnished their veneer of aloof by allowing one song to be indulged by silly noises and effects. Then again, it was about time they blotted their copybook. "Jewel/ Duel" is easily their most commercial song and currently a personal favourite, though "P-Machinery", which opens the second side, is pleasing for entirely different reasons. Using "*Power, Force, Push, Drive*" as its refrain, it would have made a far more apt soundtrack for the revamping of the film *Metropolis* than Queen's feeble efforts. This song is dramatically flawless and spectacularly produced.

"The dark religions are departed and sweet Science reigns" it says on the sleeve.

Propaganda don't like being tied to specifics. "Dr Mabuse (The First Life)" was their introduction theme and it still serves them well, disturbingly insidious, an obscured view of evil. "Sorry For Laughing" has been penned by Haig and Ross and is concerned with "strangers uniting in the interests of torment", which is amusingly highbrow and delivered as always by a resonantly perfect vocal.

But then Propaganda aim to be a perfect unit, which is a very Continental idea. Four people, Claudia, Michael, Ralf and Suzanne, who claim to be "chasing after passing visions". David Sylvian wanted the same for Japan but was taken for a foppish dilettante, which hardly seems fair. In retrospect, it was a matter of timing. Propaganda are protected by ZTT, a record company who see themselves as patrons of the arts and have gathered the influence to stand their ground. "Without Love, Beauty and Danger it would almost be easy to live," they echo. As Claudia breathes at the end of the record, "*Is this a dream within a dream?*" *Helen Fitzgerald, MM Jul 6*

Depeche Mode: "safe and predictable"

SINGLES REVIEW 1985

SINGLES

Depeche Mode
It's Called A Heart MUTE

Nothing new, nothing ventured, nothing gained. Safe and predictable synth pop from the Basildon beefcakes, and to be honest the familiar formula is beginning to wear rather thin. It needn't be like this, because Depeche are capable of some surprisingly emotional work (such as "Then" from their *Construction Time Again* LP), but this single can't muster the class or the clout of some of their better work. *MM Sept 28*

The Cult Rain BEGGARS BANQUET

Ian Astbury and co need a rethink. Although "Rain" is well played and exudes enthusiasm and excitement in all the right places, essentially it's "She Sells Sanctuary" revisited, but not as good. Even after repeated plays it falls flat on its face when compared to its illustrious predecessor. A bit of a sham all round. *MM Sept 28*

Iron Maiden Running Free EMI

Another live single intended as a taster for a forthcoming album. And on this one, all artist royalties are being donated to various anti-drug charities. Iron Maiden are one of our more convincing HM bands, and this single fits the bill perfectly – it's well played, concise and doesn't stoop to meaningless guitar or drum solos. A pleasant surprise. *MM Sept 28*

Microdisney
Birthday Girl ROUGH TRADE

Definitely the most commercial song in Microdisney's current set, "Birthday Girl" shoots out of the starting gate with assured poise and blasts most of the week's contenders into oblivion.

Prodding piano, rat-a-tat percussion, simple but effective guitar fills and solid bass sit impatiently while Catha Coughlan's expressive vocal soars high above the action. Articulate and provocative lyrics gush forth – we witness a birth, and feel the pain and torment of adolescence.

Sorry. Got a bit carried away there. Anyway, a wonderful achievement. *MM Sept 28*

The Jazz Butcher
The Human Jungle GLASS

Ah, a little epistle from the Butcher baby, and what an utter delight it is. Gentle, but persuasive, "The Human Jungle" builds steadily with hi-hat splashes and synth warblings, a brash acoustic guitar slots in to provide the underpinning, and then the song rockets into action using clever instrumental breaks and bridges which neatly link the entire work.

And guess what? It's all about Herbert Lom, who used to play psychiatrist Dr Roger Corder in the TV series *The Human Jungle*. Lie down on the couch, please... *MM Sept 28*

SHINKO MUSIC / GETTY

"I stand behind Reagan when it comes to build-up": Neil Young on stage in Los Angeles, 1985

“I’m in it for the long run”

MM hitches a ride on NEIL YOUNG’s campaign bus to hear about the new album. But what transpires is a no-holds-barred roam across his entire career and more: Reagan, Aids, David Crosby’s drug problems, even Charles Manson. “I’ve got a few demons,” says Neil. “But I manage to coexist with them.”

— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 7 —

THE BUS PAUSED for breath at a traffic light, wheezing a little. After all, it had been on the road for 10 years. It had reached a place called Troy in Upstate New York, the original one-horse town. Old men in trucker’s caps sat on benches in the deserted streets, watching it.

On the roof, the top halves of a couple of old Studebakers had been welded into place like twin observation turrets, silently surveying the passing scenery. One of them had a windsurfer board strapped on top of it. The sides of the bus were covered with weather-beaten wooden ribbing. As it accelerated away from the lights in a growl of exhaust smoke, bystanders could see the legend “BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD” across its rear. The vehicle could have been wandering the plains forever.

Inside the bus, a hound called Elvis sat in the front seat, keeping an eye on the road. Fittings, shelves, seats and sideboards were all made from hand-carved wood, right through from the kitchen area at the front, via the central lounge section, to the bedroom in the rear.

The vehicle’s owner patted the dog, who rolled his eyes mournfully upward.

“I played here once with the Buffalo Springfield,” he recalled in a voice which managed to be both dark and nasal at the same time. “I remember we didn’t get our money. »

GETTY

The guy drew a gun on us, told us to get the fuck out. Those were the good old days."

Nearly 20 years later, Neil Young had returned with his latest ensemble, a squad of veteran Nashville musicians called The International Harvesters. His new country album, *Old Ways*, is, as its author sees it, the third in a sequence of records which began with the best-selling *Harvest* in 1972, continued with the winsome *Comes A Time* in 1978, and after assorted diversions has brought him back to the road in 1985.

Old Ways is a skilfully crafted piece of work, full of perfectly assured melodies and impeccable performances from familiar Young sidemen like steel guitarist Ben Keith and Drummer Karl Himmel. More significantly, the record captures the state of mind of a man who's shot the rapids of rock'n'roll, lost some good friends along the way, wilfully turned his back on the charts and pop stardom, and who has managed to become an adult in a field where the odds are stacked against it. Neil Young has survived, and he's grown, too. And changed.

"I think in some ways – only in some ways, but in some ways – rock'n'roll has let me down," he said. "It really doesn't leave you a way to grow old gracefully and continue to work."

Why's that? Because you're supposed to die before you get old?

"Yeah, right. If you're gonna rock you better burn out, 'cos that's the way they wanna see you. They wanna see you right on the edge where you're glowing, right on the living edge, which is where young people are. They're discovering themselves, and rock'n'roll is young people's music. I think that's a reality, and I still love rock'n'roll and I love to play the songs in my set that are sort of rock'n'roll, but I don't see a future for me there."

Young paused, his lank black hair flopping forward, and rubbed his chin, which was covered in a heavy overnight stubble. "I see country music, I see people who take care of their own. You got 75-year-old guys on the road. That's what I was put here to do, y'know, so I wanna make sure I surround myself with people who are gonna take care of me. 'Cos I'm in it for the long run.

"Willie Nelson's 54 years old and he's a happy man, doing what he loves to do. I can't think of one rock'n'roller like that. So what am I gonna do?"

Old Ways features guest appearances from country luminaries Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, both of whom will be playing some support dates with Young on his current tour. A lot of the performances find Young and his International Harvesters playing to family audiences at state fairs, huge day-long gatherings of people, animals, carnival sideshows, food and drink, where everyone turns up for the entertainment in the evening. It's miles away from the rock'n'roll crowds who've flocked over the years to see Young play with Buffalo Springfield, Crosby Stills & Nash or his perennial backing band, Crazy Horse.

> "Rock'n'roll is young people's music. I think that's a reality"

YOUNG IS STILL best known among non-partisan observers as the laid-back whiner who had a hit single with "Heart Of Gold" in 1972. His early-'70s albums, *After The Gold Rush* and *Harvest*, provided a melancholy soundtrack for any number of mentally unbalanced young people to ponder suicide to. His work with Buffalo Springfield in the '60s brought him into fierce creative proximity with Stephen Stills, and among a bunch of fine songs recorded by the group, it's still Young's dreamlike mock-symphonies "Expecting To Fly" and "Broken Arrow" that remain the most haunting and inexplicable.

Young joined Crosby Stills & Nash as additional instrumentalist and dark horse. His stint with them barely lasted a year, but it got him some prime exposure on their album *Déjà Vu* and set Young up perfectly for his subsequent solo career. The association also proved to be something of an albatross, but as the years passed and Young's own albums pursued a grim and tortuous path, it became clear that while CSNY had given him a priceless commercial boost, it had scarcely hinted at the depth and range of his talent.

Records like *Tonight's The Night*, *On The Beach* and *Time Fades Away* were to prove emphatically that Young could hardly have been less like the hippy peacenik the media fondly imagined him to be.

Crosby Stills & Nash are still playing together and grossing wads of dollars, but Young won't have anything to do with them until David Crosby kicks his cocaine habit. The topic brings out a hard puritanical streak in him, probably because he's seen several friends die from drug abuse.

"David says that he loves to play music with Crosby Stills Nash & Young more than anything in the world. I told them that when they could prove to me that that's *really* what he wanted to do with his life and give up drugs, I would go out with them. I told them that three years ago, and it hasn't happened yet.

"The way I look at it, either he's going to OD and die or we're going to play together sometime. It's pretty simple. But until one of those things happens, until he cleans up, I'm not gonna do it. Live Aid was an exception to the rule which I made up on the spot. They all know how I feel.

"I will not go out with CSNY, have everyone scrutinise the band, how big it is and how much it meant, and see this guy that's so fucked up on drugs, and who's not really so fucked up that he can't come back – because we've all seen him when he's been clean recently, where he's very sharp just like he always was.

"But he seems to feel like he wants to do that, or he would stop doing it. So, y'know, until he has more respect for life and his effects on the young people… why should some young person who loves CSNY's old records from listening to their parents play them, some young kid 12 years old, why should he see CSNY on TV and know that this guy's a cocaine addict, been freebasing for fuckin' years and years and years, and he looks like a vegetable but they're still on TV and they're still making it and they're still big stars? I don't wanna show anybody that. That's something no one should see."

On the recent Live Aid broadcast, Young and his band were seen delivering a song called "Nothing Is Perfect". It's not included on *Old Ways* and is a strikingly forthright declaration of Young's current absorption with family life and an almost gung-ho enthusiasm for Ronald Reagan's America. Young in the main steered clear of the loudmouth leftish politics of Crosby Stills & Nash, but wrote the scorching "Ohio" after National Guardsmen shot four students at Kent State University. It's something of a shock to find him supporting Reagan's arms build-up. The Loner has turned Republican.

"In the Carter years, everybody was walking around with their tails between their legs talking with their head down, y'know, thinking America's been so bad, we've done all these things wrong. But, especially militarily, we had a lot of disasters and a lot of things that never should have happened and that maybe were mistakes in the first place, although it's hard to say.

"People were being killed everywhere before we went over to try to help, and we went over and tried to help them and we fucked up. But y'know, you can't always feel sorry for everything that you did. Obviously I wish no one had to die in any war, but war is, ah, is a dirty game.

"It seems like the Soviets, it doesn't bother them that much to walk into Afghanistan and kill people left and right and take the fucking country and do all that shit. You can't just let them keep on fucking doing that without saying enough's enough. So to do that, to have the strength to do that, you have to be strong.

"Ten years ago, the US was starting to really drag ass, way behind the Soviets in build-up. All that's happened lately is more or less to catch up, just to be equal, reach equality in arms. At best it's a bad situation, but I think it would be worse to be weak when the stronger nation is the aggressor against freedom.

"So I stand behind Reagan when it comes to build-up, to stand, be able to play hardball with other countries that are aggressive towards free countries. I don't think there's anything wrong with that."

But would you have thought that way in 1967?

"No, no I wouldn't have thought that in 1967. But I'm an older man now, I have a family. I see other people with families. There's no immediate threat to American families, but there is an immediate threat to other families in free countries, y'know, a lot of the countries on the borders of the Iron Curtain. To stand there and say it could never happen is wrong, because it's happened. We just don't want it to happen any more – at least, I don't."

It seems utterly insane when you think of the billions of pounds or dollars that have been spent since 1945 on weapons that have never been used, surely?

"It is crazy, it's fucking nuts," growled Young. "At least in our countries we have the fucking freedom to stand up and say it's crazy. And that's

what we're fighting for, to be able to disagree. Openly. And it's our right, and we have to do everything we can to preserve it.

"So I don't put down anybody who says we should stop building weapons and everything. I disagree with them, practically. Idealistically, I agree with them. It's like walking both sides of the fence, but I think there's too much to be responsible for as men and as people, that you have to take care of your own. So that's why I have more of a sympathy for Reagan than other people would have – a lot of other people in my walk of life."

But that sounds dangerously like an "every man for himself" philosophy? Correct me if I'm wrong…

"Sort of, but… I think it's more like every man for his brother than it is every man for himself. That's how I look at it. I think it's real important to be strong."

Young's attitude has not been formed overnight. Looking back, it's easy to spot traces of it on his 1980 album *Hawks & Doves*, a patchy phase in his continuing evolution. "Union Man" was a jokey item apparently supporting the Musicians' Union proposition that "*live music is better*", Young celebrating the idea of communal togetherness with an exhausting slab of hoedown. In "Comin' Apart At Every Nail", he avowed that "*this country sure looks good to me*" even while it was falling to bits in some respects. The concluding "Hawks & Doves", a powerful slice of country raunch, examined cycles of history, both in terms of America's past and as they applied to Young's own career. He declared himself "*willing to stay and pay*".

In 1981, Young released *Re-Ac-Tor*, an even scrappier piece of work. Thematic continuity could still be discerned occasionally, however, as in "Motor City", where he patriotically lamented the demise of the American car industry as the Japanese invaded ("*There's already too many Datsuns in this town*"). Then there was the hard-driving "Southern Pacific", a paean to the disappearance of the old railroads and the men who worked on them. Young's current live show contains a powerful reworking of the piece, and it sits comfortably alongside his hymns to home, family and an America dusting off its battered pride. Redneck? Let's hope not.

On tour, Young travels alone. Dave, his driver and minder, will motor from the gig and park for the night at a rest area or truck-stop. Young won't see the band until soundcheck the next day, though he's in radio contact with them.

On board the bus, Young played the perfect host, breaking out the Budweisers and demonstrating his fruit-juice machine. "Natural fruit juice is great, better'n any drug," he explained. "Gives you a natural sugar rush." By way of a preamble, he also vented some spleen about the mauling doled out to him by the British music press on his last British visit, when he played heavy metal at Wembley Arena. He seemed especially incensed by some impertinent scribe who'd alluded to pedal steel guitarist Ben Keith's blow-dried hair. Reading between the lines, it appears the tour was a shambles on a musical and organisational level. Today, Young seems balanced, positive and very clear about his objectives.

"I think it's time to be positive," he said, looking across the table with eyes that could bore through steel. Tour manager Glenn Palmer says he always knows from a single glance if Young is unhappy about something. If he is, he beats a retreat and comes back later. »

Buffalo Springfield in 1967: (l–r) Bruce Palmer, Stephen Stills, Dewey Martin, Richie Furay and Neil Young

GETTY

July 14, 1974: Crosby Stills Nash & Young playing the second of promoter Bill Graham's annual Day On The Green concerts at Oakland Coliseum, California

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES / GETTY

"I think if all the hippies and everything from the '60s, if they're still complaining about every little fucking thing, if they're not happy about anything, it's their own fucking fault. 'Cos they're the ones who should have changed it. Time has gone by now and what we have is what we've done so far, and if they're still putting down everything that they've done, then I really don't feel compassion for that."

I thought I heard the sound of distant cheering.

"We should be proud of the things we have been able to do, and the positive aspects of who we are in the world. It's our own creativity, ingenuity, whatever you wanna call it. I don't think all that's dead in America, I think it's still there. I feel that the '60s was a decade of idealism, and the '80s is more of realism."

ON THE ROAD, Young has time to think and write. By the time the *Maker* caught up with him, he'd already written a new song called "This Old House" and worked it into the set. It's about the enduring strength of family and a sense of identity in the face of hard times and repo men from the bank. "*This old house of mine is built on dreams*," Young concludes.

His writing has always flirted with cliche, and paradoxically he's often at his best in that area, working the edge between insight and platitude. Consequently, he's always been ready for the country, where homespun philosophy is the order of the day – but only if it's been earned by hard experience. But, crucially, Young's work has been distinguished over the years by a mystical dimension beyond the experience of most artists. There's a feverish, luminous undertow to his best songs. It's difficult to analyse, perhaps because his most powerful images are more visual than verbal.

I asked him about the new song "Misfits". It's the odd man out on *Old Ways*, a strange collage of science fiction and apparently disconnected scenes, "all related" (according to the *LA Times*) "only by a modern isolation as profound as any ever experienced on the open range".

Young scratched his head, turned to look ahead through the windscreen, then pivoted back again. "There are a lot of science-fiction overtones, time-travel overtones, in 'Misfits'. People at different places geographically; it could all have been happening at exactly the same time. All of the scenes in that song could have been happening simultaneously, and yet they're also separate. It's an interesting thing…

"I dunno, it only took me a few minutes to write it. I picked up my electric guitar one night in the studio, I was by myself and I turned it up real loud and started playing, and I wrote it just that night. Just got into it. Jotted it down on a piece of paper.

"I try not to think about the songs that I write, I just try to write them. And I try not to edit them, because I think editing is a form of, ah… I know there's a source where music comes through you and words come through you, and editing is really, uh, something you do to something that you've thought about. If you think about it and you try to put it down, then you can edit it. If you're not thinking about it, you just open up and let it come through you, then editing it is… you're really taking a lot of, what's the word, ah, a lotta liberties by editing."

But if it's yours, aren't you allowed to edit it?

"Well that's the thing, I'm not sure that everything I write is mine. That's the difference. I think some of the things I write are mine, but I think some of it just comes through me. My mind is working behind the scenes and puts these things together without me consciously thinking of it, and then when the time is right it all comes out. That's more like, y'know, creation in the true sense of the word than it is a contrivance.

"So it doesn't really need to be edited so long as you get it out right, get it out clean, y'know, without second-guessing yourself every line thinking, 'What are people gonna think of me if I write this?' That's

something I try to stay away from. I try not to worry about what people are gonna think about it till after I've recorded it and it's too late to change it. Then I'll start worrying about it. But then it's too late for me to fuck it up, so…"

Do you have to be in a certain mood to write?

"Yeah, it just kinda comes and goes. Sometimes I write first thing in the morning. There's no rules. A lotta times I write driving vehicles, or moving in vehicles, with no instruments, and I'll write the whole song and remember it all and know exactly what the music is before I even pick up an instrument. The whole thing, it just falls into place."

Do you ever dry up?

"Yeah. That happens. I just wait. I don't try to think of something cool to write. Because sometimes I won't have a record out for a long time, and then I'll have two or three out really fast. The time between *Everybody's Rockin'* and *Old Ways* was a longer period of time than Buffalo Springfield or CSNY was together. I still wrote a lotta songs in that period; I wrote two-and-a-half or three albums' worth of material, so really I have a lot of stuff in the can that's been recorded, and a few songs that haven't been recorded."

The Neil Young roadshow seems to cut across several generations. The shows I saw in Rochester and Troy were both in arenas in front of some 8,000 people, a lot of them college students.

"I just accepted this is what I'm doing now, I'm not 25, I'm not jumping around just doing rock'n'roll, this is me, so I shouldn't try to be something I'm not. And once I accepted that in myself, everything was alright. But it is hard sometimes to see a young crowd and to go out there and remember that I played in front of crowds that age when I was that age, and what I was like, and not try to be that way."

Doesn't it feel strange, singing songs like "Once An Angel" and talking about your family to a bunch of kids?

"If they can get something from that then fine, and last night they seemed to," said Young, the day after the Rochester show. "Even though they're young, most of 'em are only a couple of years away from being married or having a meaningful relationship, and a lot of them are married. There's a lot more older people at the back that aren't running up to the front, so it's there for all of them. A lot of them come because to them it's history – they're seeing things they've only heard about."

The sets contain material from every phase of Young's career, though he's whittled down the demented electric side of his music. His main chance to stretch out on guitar is in "Down By The River", where he attacks his familiar black Gibson as Joe Allen modifies the long-familiar bassline slightly. Rufus Thibodeaux, the Cajun fiddler from Louisiana who's built like Mount Rushmore, perches himself immovably stage left, jigging massively in time to Young's twisted soloing – though it's noticeable that Young's playing is more organised and better sculptured than it might have been in a show with Crazy Horse. Young's even written a punchy new song about his band, called "Grey Riders".

The sets open with an old song, "Country Home". There are several tunes from *Old Ways*, plus "Looking For A Love", "Helpless" and a beautifully loping "Comes A Time" as reference points. The best reception of the night, though, is not for "Heart Of Gold" but for the haunted "Old Man", with the evergreen "Sugar Mountain" running it a close second.

"I do 'Sugar Mountain' really for the people more than I do it for myself," Young explained. "I think I owe it to them, 'cos it seems to really make them feel happy, so that's why I do that. They pay a lotta money to come and see me and I lay a lotta things on 'em that they've never heard before, and I think I owe it to them to do things they can really identify with.

"It's such a friendly song, and the older I get and the older my audience gets, the more relevant it becomes, especially since they've been singing it for 20 years. It really means a lot to them, so I like to give 'em the chance to enjoy that moment."

He paused for a moment, then the familiar wolfish grin spread across his face. "I had it on the B-side of almost every single that I had out for 10 years."

No doubt this careful consideration of the audience's wishes stems from the balance Young has managed to strike in both his personal and professional lives. His wife isn't on the road with him this time as she usually is – she's back at the California ranch looking after the kids, a brother and sister. Young has another son, who suffers from cerebral palsy. This has profoundly influenced his outlook on life.

"I've always felt that God made my son the way he is because he was trying to show me something, so I try to do as much positive as I can for people like that, and for families of kids who are handicapped. I have a lot of compassion for those people and a lot of understanding for them that I didn't have before, and I think it's made me a better person.

"And I think since I have the power to influence so many people, it was only natural that I should be shown so many extremes of life, so I could reflect it somehow. Nothing is perfect, y'know, that's it."

— MELODY MAKER SEPTEMBER 14 —

LOOKING BACK 10 years or more, Young can now put his well-documented bleak period into a longer perspective. After Harvest had clocked up sales running into millions, Young's fans were horrified first by the release of the double album *Journey Through The Past*, a bitty and meaningless "soundtrack" for Young's rarely seen film of the same name. After the album came out, the film company refused to release the movie, to Young's continuing disgust.

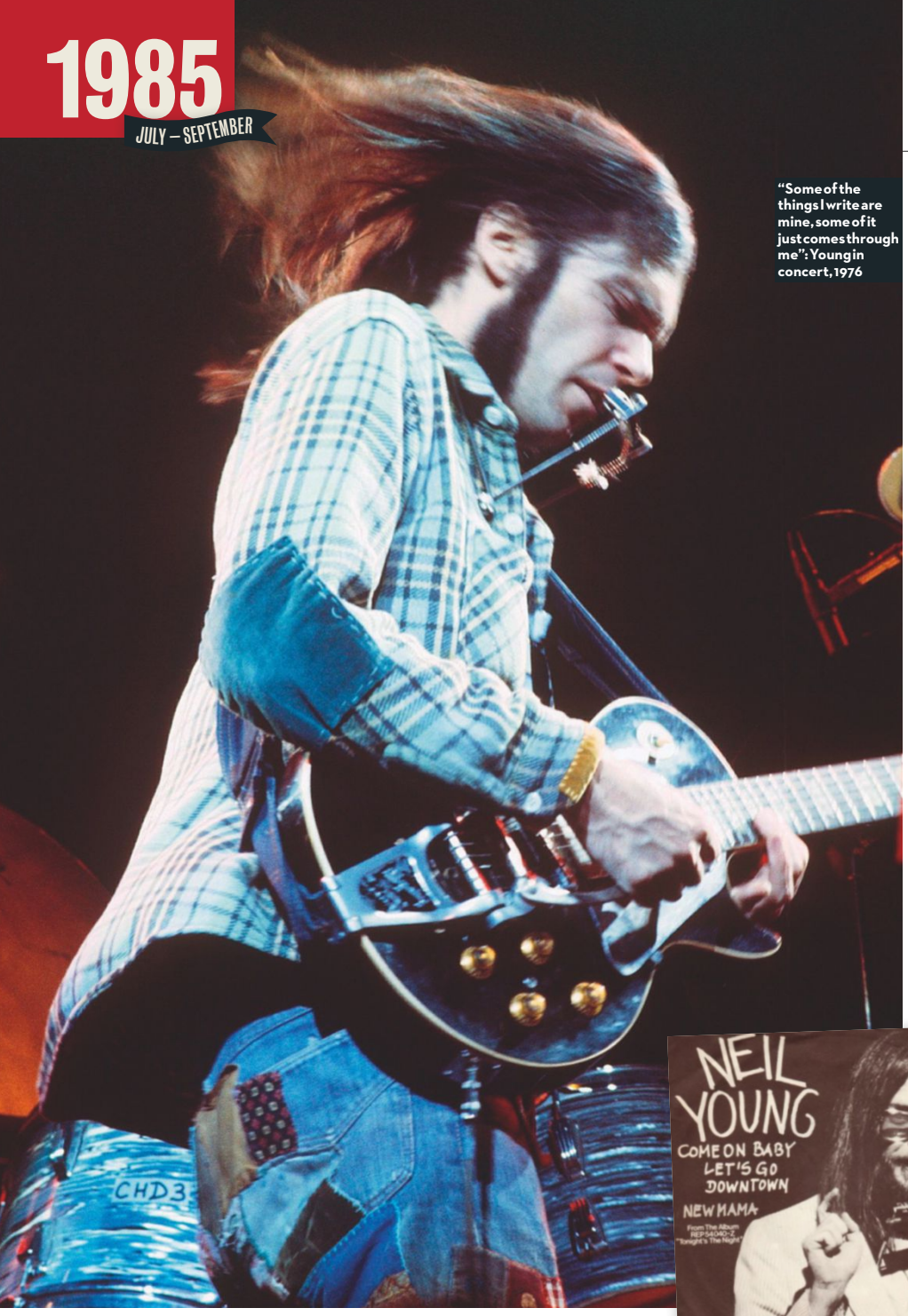
Next came the nerve-shredding live album *Time Fades Away*, a dingy and macabre affair notably devoid of the pure melodies beloved of his soft-rockin' aficionados. Young, feeling boxed in by commercial success, had steered away from it. The chart performance of "Heart Of Gold" had brought him a lot of things he found he didn't want.

"I guess at that point I'd attained a lot of fame and everything that you dream about when you're a teenager. I was still only 23 or 24, and I realised I had a long way to go and this wasn't going to be the most satisfying thing, just sittin' around basking in the glory of having a hit record. It's really a very shallow experience, it's actually a very empty experience.

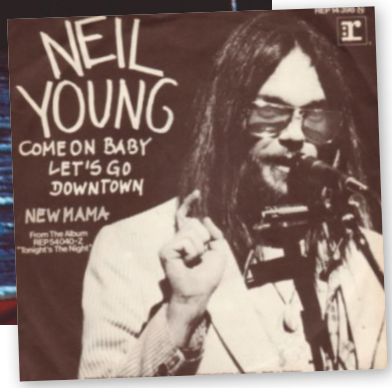
> "Sittin' around basking in the glory of a hit is a very shallow experience"

"It's nothing concrete except ego gratification, which is an extremely unnerving kind of feeling. So I think subconsciously I set out to destroy that and rip it down, before it surrounded me. I could feel a wall building up around me."

To add insult to injury, his next studio recording was the harrowing *Tonight's The Night*, though with a perversity that was becoming typical of him, the latter wasn't released until after the subsequently cut *On The Beach*. Both albums stand up strongly to this day. Both use the rock format as a means of redemption and rejuvenation, the very act of recording (no overdubs) serving as therapy. »



"Some of the things I write are mine, some of it just comes through me": Young in concert, 1976



"*Tonight's The Night* and *On The Beach* were pretty free records," Young pondered, lighting another unfiltered Pall Mall. "I was pretty down I guess at the time, but I just did what I wanted to do, at that time. I think if everybody looks back at their own lives they'll realise that they went through something like that. There's periods of depression, periods of elation, optimism and scepticism, the whole thing is… it just keeps coming in waves.

"You go down to the beach and watch the same thing, just imagine every wave is a different set of emotions coming in. Just keep coming. As long as you don't ignore it, it'll still be there. If you start shutting yourself off and not letting yourself live through the things that are coming through you, I think that's when people start getting old really fast, that's when they really age.

"'Cos they decide that they're happy to be what they were at a certain time in their lives when they were the happiest, and they say, 'That's where I'm gonna be for the rest of my life.' From that minute on they're dead, y'know, just walking around. I try to avoid that."

One of the key tracks from *On The Beach* was "Revolution Blues", a predatory rocker in which Young adopts the persona of a trigger-happy psychotic, eager to slaughter Laurel Canyon's pampered superstar residents. Reflecting on the song prods Young into some unsettling areas.

"That was based on my experiences with Charlie Manson. I met him a couple of times and, er… very interesting person. Obviously he was quite keyed up."

Gulp. Was that before or… after the Sharon Tate killings?

"Before. About six months before. He's quite a writer and a singer, really unique – very unique, and he wanted very badly to get a recording contract. I was at [Beach Boy] Dennis Wilson's house when I met Charlie. Coupla times.

"The thing about Charlie Manson was you'd never hear the same song twice. It was one of the interesting things about him. He had a very mysterious power about him which I'm hesitant to even fuckin' think about, it's so strong and it was so dark, so I really don't like to talk about it very much. I don't even know why I brought it up."

Young stopped talking for a moment. Thought we'd lost him, but he continued.

"There is a saying that if you don't look the devil in the eye you're alright, but once you've looked him in the eye you'll never forget him, and there'll always be more devil in you than there was before.

"And it's hard to say, you know. The devil is not a cartoon character, like God is on one side of the page and he's on the other. The devil lives in every one and God lives in everyone. There no book that tells you when the devil said to God 'fuck you' and God said (*makes raspberry noise*). All those books that are written are just one person's opinion.

"I can't follow that, but I can see these things in other people. You can see it and feel it. But Manson would sing a song and just make it up as he went along, for three or four minutes, and he never would repeat one word, and it all made perfect sense and it shook you up to listen to it. It was so good that it scared you."

A couple of years later, then, Young wrote "Revolution Blues" – "*Well I'm a barrel of laughs with my carbine on / I keep them hopping till my ammunition's gone*"… So how did the superstar community take it, Neil?

"Well, see, I wasn't touring at the time, so I didn't really feel the reaction of *On The Beach*. Then when I went out on the road I didn't do any of it, so…" He did, however, perform the song on the Crosby Stills Nash & Young reunion tour, to the discomfiture of the others.

"David Crosby especially was very uncomfortable, because it was so much the darker side. They all wanted to put out the light, y'know, make people feel good and happy and everything, and that song was like a wart or something on the perfect beast."

WHEN IT CAME to the release of *Tonight's The Night*, Young again incurred the wrath and disbelief of people who thought they knew him fairly well. The album had been recorded with a Crazy Horse reconstituted after the death of songwriter and guitarist Danny Whitten, a close friend of Young's who'd given him early encouragement in his career.

Whitten had been due to go out on tour with Young, but was too heavily dependent on heroin to cope. Young sent him home. The same night, Whitten died of an overdose. *Time Fades Away* documented the subsequent tour, while *Tonight's The Night* was made in memory of Whitten and Bruce Berry, a CSNY roadie who also died from heroin.

Young remembered the day he'd taken *Tonight…* into the offices of Reprise, his record company at the time.

"It was pretty rocky," he grinned. "I would describe that as a rocky day. They couldn't believe how sloppy and rough it was, they couldn't believe that I really wanted to put it out.

REX FEATURES

"I said, 'That's it, that's the way it's going out.' It's a very important record, I think, in my general field of things. It still stands up. The original *Tonight's The Night* was much heavier than the one that hit the stands. The original one had only nine songs on it. It was the same takes, but the songs that were missing were 'Lookout Joe' and 'Borrowed Tune', a couple of songs that I added. They fit lyrically but they softened the blow a little bit.

"What happened was, the original had only nine songs but it had a lot of talking, a lot of mumbling and talking between the group and me, more disorganised and fucked-up sounding than the songs, but they were intros to the songs. Not counts but little discussions, three- and four-word conversations between songs, and it left it with a very spooky feeling. It was like you didn't know if these guys were still gonna be alive in the morning, the way they were talking. More like a wake than anything else."

Why did you take it off, then?

"It was too strong," said Young slowly. "It was really too strong. I never even played it for the record company like that. We made our own decision not to do that. If they thought *Tonight's The Night* was too much the way it came out – which they did, a lot of people – they're lucky they didn't hear the other one."

It was here that Young hit the lowest patch, spiritually, of his career, probably of his life. His impatience nowadays with the hippy generation, and his endorsement of a right-wing president, believed by many to be a dangerous lunatic, can probably be traced back to the traumas around the time of *Tonight's The Night*. Until then, the ride had been more or less free.

Was it, I queried, a case of Whitten's death being not only a personal tragedy, but a metaphor for a generation and a way of life? Or death?

"It just seemed like it really stood for a lot of what was going on," Young answered. "It was like the freedom of the '60s and free love and drugs and everything… it was the price tag. This is your bill. Friends, young guys dying, kids that didn't even know what they were doing, didn't know what they were fucking around with. It hit me pretty hard, a lot of those things, so at that time I did sort of exorcise myself."

Did you feel guilty that perhaps you and people in your position had encouraged that?.

"Somewhat, yeah, I think so. That's part of the responsibility of freedom. Freedom to do what you want with not much experience to realise the consequences. I didn't feel very guilty, but I felt a little guilty."

> "Earth is pollinating… We need to spread out in the universe"

IT'S FITTING THAT Young's latest re-emergence in public with yet another shift in musical direction should coincide with a wave of new groups who acknowledge a debt to his past work. Green On Red's Dan Stuart freely admits that their *Gas Food Lodging* LP was heavily influenced by Young's epic *Zuma* collection ("If you're gonna steal, steal from the best," as Stuart puts it). Jason & The Scorchers play "Are You Ready For The Country?", The Beat Farmers turn in a welt-raising treatment of "Powderfinger", and Pete Wylie's just cut a version of "The Needle And The Damage Done" as an anti-heroin gesture. And Dream Syndicate's Steve Wynn will reminisce about Young and Crazy Horse any time you like.

With half the material for a follow-up album to *Old Ways* already in the can, Young is in the middle of a renaissance of sorts. Not even the Aids terror can dent his confidence.

"It is scary. It's paranoid, but that's the way it is – even though it's not just gay people, they're taking the rap. There's a lotta religious people, of course, who feel that this is God's work. God's saying, y'know, 'No more buttfucking or we're gonna getcha.'" Young cackled dementedly.

"I don't know what it is. It's natural, that's one thing about it. It's a living organism or virus, whatever it is. I hope they find something to stop it. It's worse than the Killer Bees."

Young's conception of the entire universe is, to say the least, unorthodox.

"I'm not into organised religion. I'm into believing in a higher source of creation, realising that we're all just part of nature and we're all animals. We're very highly evolved and we should be very responsible for what we've learned.

"I even go as far as to think that in the plan of things, the natural plan of things, that the rockets and the satellites, spaceships, that we're creating now are really… we're pollinating, as a universe, and it's part of the universe. Earth is a flower and it's pollinating.

"It's starting to send out things, and now we're evolving, they're getting bigger and they're able to go further. And they have to, because we need to spread out now in the universe. I think in 100 years we'll be living on other planets."

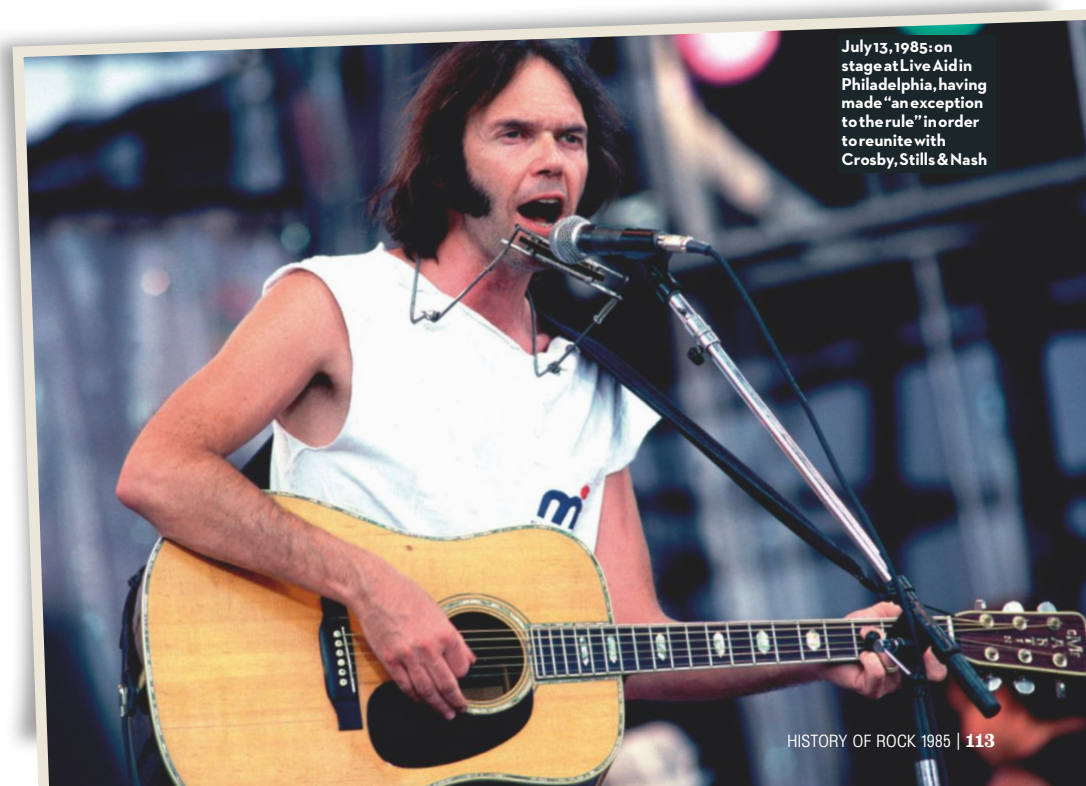
On a more earthly plane, Young's excited about the prospect of playing a benefit for the people of Cheyenne, Wyoming, whose houses and land have been devastated by a freak sequence of natural disasters. Young's band and equipment will be airlifted in for the show, by National Guard C130 transport aircraft and by private jets loaned for the occasion by some giant corporations.

"There's something different about it," Young mused, "having the government help us get there so we can help the farmers. The National Guard's gonna help us load and unload, get in and outta the place, help us set up the stage. It's interesting."

But it's something else, above and beyond his this-land-is-your-land preoccupations, that gives Neil Young his lingering aura of menace and strange purpose. You can feel it when you talk to him, and it permeates all his best music. He sees it something like this.

"I've got a few demons, but I manage to coexist with them. The demons are there all the time, y'know, that's what makes you crazy, that's what makes me play my guitar the way I play it sometimes. Depends on the balance, how strong the demons are that night, how strong the good is.

"There's always a battle between good and evil in every second in your life, I think. In every judgement you make, both sides are represented in your mind. You may hide the bad side, but it's there." *Adam Sweeting* •



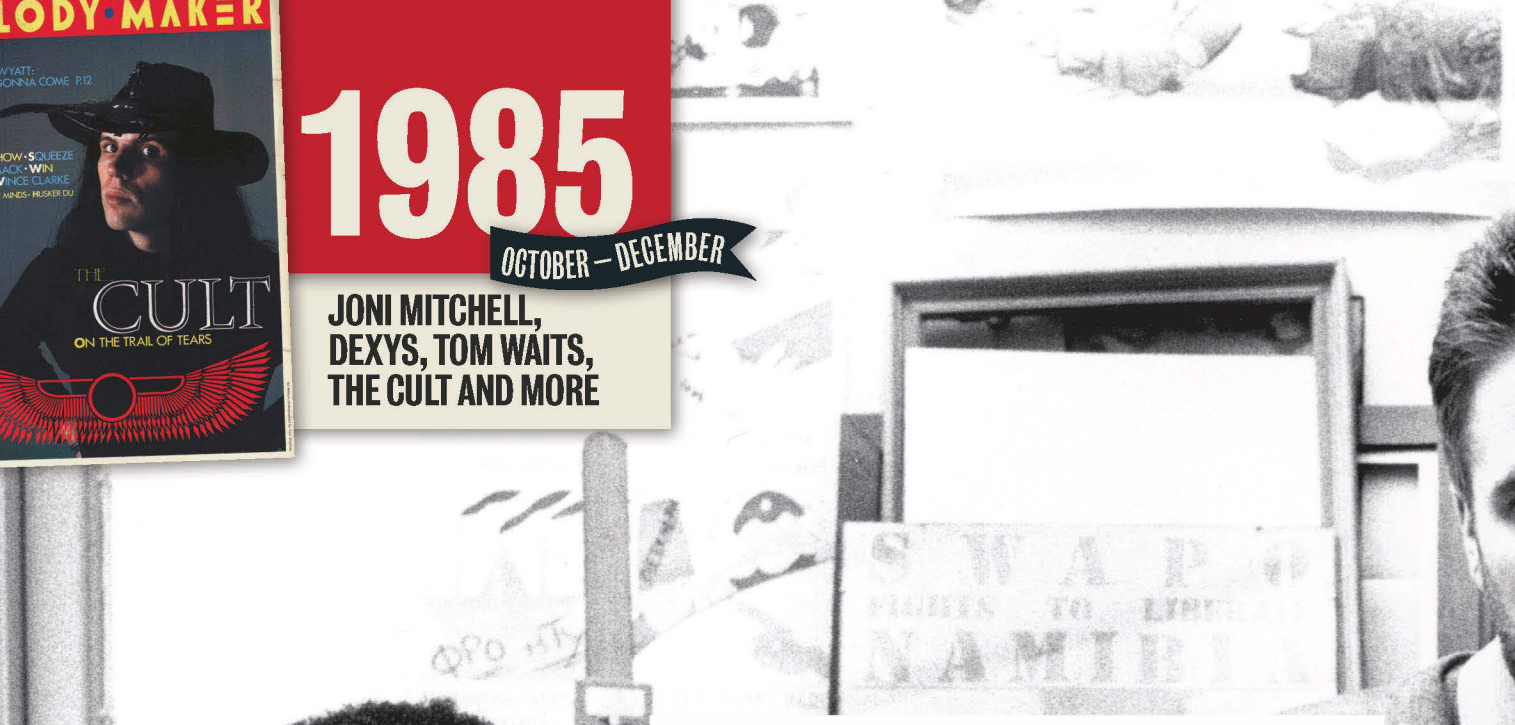
July 13, 1985: on stage at Live Aid in Philadelphia, having made "an exception to the rule" in order to reunite with Crosby, Stills & Nash

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

1985

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

JONI MITCHELL, DEXYS, TOM WAITS, THE CULT AND MORE



"Part of a campaign"

MM OCT 26 Jerry Dammers and Robert Wyatt unite to help the Namibian resistance movement.

ROBERT WYATT LOOKED strangely nervous on the *Whistle Test*, trying to explain to Mark Ellen what "The Wind Of Change" is about. Jerry Dammers, who produced the disc, began to liken Namibian resistance to South African tyranny to the sort of movement which would have sprung up in Britain had Hitler managed to invade. Ellen couldn't shut him up quickly enough, and they cut swiftly to the accompanying video. If Live Aid made charity pretty darn hip, Third World consciousness-raising is a trickier proposition altogether.

"The Wind Of Change" was produced and arranged by Dammers, and Wyatt sings it over a chorus of SWAPO members, SWAPO being Namibia's national liberation movement. Additional musicians playing on the track include Lynval Golding, Annie Whitehead, Dick Cuthell and Claire Hirst. On the B-side, this crew address themselves to "Namibia", a tune originally called "Namibia Inkanda Vetu" (Namibia Is Our Home) and married here to a specially written poem by Vaino Shivute, a SWAPO student currently studying in England.

Frankly, "The Wind Of Change" isn't a patch on Dammers' classic "Free Nelson Mandela" if we're talking chart appeal. The latter achieved the hitherto almost unprecedented feat of isolating an issue and turning it into genuinely infectious pop.

But, as a jet-lagged Dammers put it: "Every little helps. With the Nelson Mandela record, it was part of a campaign but it did help to publicise it. I think a lot of people now know who Nelson Mandela is, whereas three years ago there was very little publicity about him.

"I think music has always been an important part of any kind of social struggle or whatever, and I don't think *Top Of The Pops* – OK, the structure of the charts and Radio 1 and everything – is weighted against things like that, but sometimes things do break through. And even if it's not a massive hit, it's still a worthwhile song."

Can't spot any loopholes in that logic. In a piece called *On Politics, Pop And Namibia* written to accompany the release of the new record, Wyatt wrote: "The pop industry exists to perpetuate itself. True, EMI will promote a John Lennon protest song, but it will also quite happily help the racist South African occupation crush the local protest-song movement by flooding Namibia with Anglo-American alternatives. As long as the giant record companies monopolise our ears, musicians who are out of tune with the establishment must conduct a kind of oral guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines."

Wyatt's home in Twickenham is like a kind of monument to freedom movements of the world. Stickers, badges, posters, books and magazines are everywhere, addressing themselves to ecology, »

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

"Every little helps": (l-r) Richard Muzira from the SWAPO Singers, Jerry Dammers and Robert Wyatt pose in the latter's house in Twickenham, South-West London

AJ BARRATT

liberation and racism. It's here that he, Dammers, Vaino Shivute and Richard Muzira, a SWAPO organiser, gather to explain the situation in Namibia and the role that "Wind Of Change"/ "Namibia" is intended to play in trying to change it.

Richard: "In Namibia you have over 230 trans-national corporations, and 68 of them are British. Out of those, nine of them virtually control the total economy. They include Barclays, Standard, Rio Tinto Zinc… and these very same people give a lot of money to the Tories. Something like 40 per cent of the funds comes from companies that operate in South Africa and Namibia. It's inevitable that they stand in the way of progress."

Jerry: "It should be seen as part of a campaign. I don't think people in this country realise how important it is that international pressure is brought to bear on South Africa. Because without the help of Thatcher and Reagan, apartheid probably wouldn't survive, so if you can turn public opinion in Britain and America against apartheid and they can take political action in those countries, it does have a very great effect within South Africa."

Won't people look at your record and say charity begins at home? There's massive unemployment and miners' families still suffering the aftermath of the strike. Why aren't you making records about them?

Jerry: "I don't see it as separate issues. You have to have an international view of politics, and if we're talking about unemployment in this country, then again that's the Tory government that's bolstering apartheid in South Africa."

Robert: "I'd like to mention one link that illustrates what Jerry's saying. We all know who Saatchi & Saatchi are, right. They're the Ministry Of Propaganda for the Tories. But they've got massive unemployment in South Africa, they're trying to recruit white miners they can incorporate into the apartheid system, who are easier to manipulate than the black miners, so in fact unemployment here is directly related to South Africa's problems.

"The British government's policy of mass unemployment is dovetailed very neatly with their support for apartheid, although officially they don't support it. But sometimes you judge people by their friends, and Saatchi & Saatchi are friends of the apartheid government. The right wing are totally international. As Ian MacGregor [Scottish-American head of National Coal Board] says, 'I don't vote here. I vote in Miami', and he doesn't care. The whole scene we live under is an international scene.

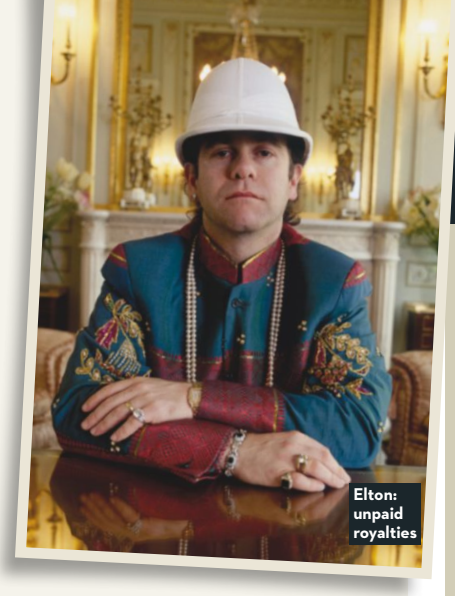
"They keep the people they deal with, the workers they employ and the workers that they unemploy, divided and separate from each other. So they sort of blackmail workers in the industrialised countries by saying, 'Well, if you want such and such wages, we'll get dirt-cheap labour in another country', which is exactly what they do, which is why they imported South African coal during the miners' strike.

"So they use their friends' control of other labour markets to blackmail workers in our country. So it's only if the people in the various countries see that they're being exploited by the same people that they can see that they've got the same problems, they're dealing with the same oppressors." *Adam Sweeting*

TERRY O'NEILL / GETTY; PETER STILL / GETTY

Unlikely to exceed £500,000

NME DEC 12 Elton John wins a lawsuit – but it's not a complete victory.



Elton: unpaid royalties

ELTON JOHN AND his songwriting partner Bernie Taupin finally won part of their 50-day High Court action against Dick James Music last Friday, when the judge ruled that DJM's various companies had siphoned off large sums of royalties that should have been paid to the duo. Now John and Taupin will collect the amounts due to them, which could be as much as £5 million, although DJM claim they are unlikely to exceed £500,000. Despite John hailing the verdict as a total victory, he and Taupin failed to recover the copyright of 169 songs, including such hits as "Rocket Man", "Daniel" and "Yellow Brick Road", having signed to DJM for life in 1967. If the judge had also ruled this decision in their favour, the payment could have run into tens of millions. As it is, a decision on costs has still to be made; after such a lengthy case, these are expected to top £1.5m.

July 6, 1985: Bruce entertains Wembley Stadium (and anyone up to half a mile away)

"Enforcement action"

MM OCT 5 Springsteen show sparks noise row.

BRENT COUNCIL IS taking Wembley Stadium to court over sound levels at Bruce Springsteen's July concerts. After the concerts, council members agreed to take the Stadium to court. But last week, discussions were reopened at a meeting of the housing committee when councillors were told that the sound levels at Springsteen often reached twice the permitted volume, and that words and music were distinguishable half a mile away from the Stadium.

When Brent Council takes over licensing arrangements after the abolition of the GLC next year, they will take "enforcement action" against "both the Stadium and the promoter of noisy pop concerts" and install electronic equipment that will "give immediate warning when maximum noise levels are being reached".

➤ The Jesus And Mary Chain, back in the charts with "Just Like Honey", are losing their part-time drummer Bobby Gillespie. He's been with them since their inception, but is now leaving to concentrate on his own group Primal Scream, so they are now looking for a new drummer. Applicants for the vacancy should write to the band c/o Rough Trade, 67–71 Collier Street, London N1 and should be familiar with Ginger Baker's solo on the track "Toad" on Cream's LP *Wheels Of Fire*. *NME Oct 19*

➤ Steely Dan have re-formed. The band had signed to Warner Brothers in 1980, just prior to the release of their seventh MCA album, *Gaucho*, but split before providing any material for their new label. Since then, Donald Fagen has released a solo album, *The Nightfly*, via Warners, while his Dan co-founder Walter Becker has been working as a producer. But, in the wake of the highly successful *Reelin' In The Years* compilation, Fagen and Becker will undertake the first Steely Dan tour for over 10 years. *NME Dec 12*

➤ Following a statement by Hazel Feldman, Sun City's entertainment director, that "a return appearance by Queen should not be ruled out" (*NME* last week), the band have issued a denial: "Queen categorically state that they have no plans, at present, to return to Sun City and wish to make it plain that they have a total abhorrence of apartheid." *NME Oct 5*

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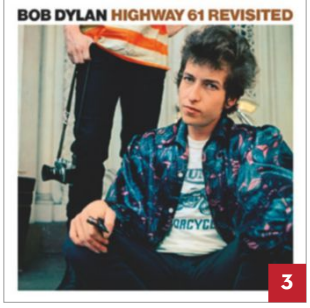

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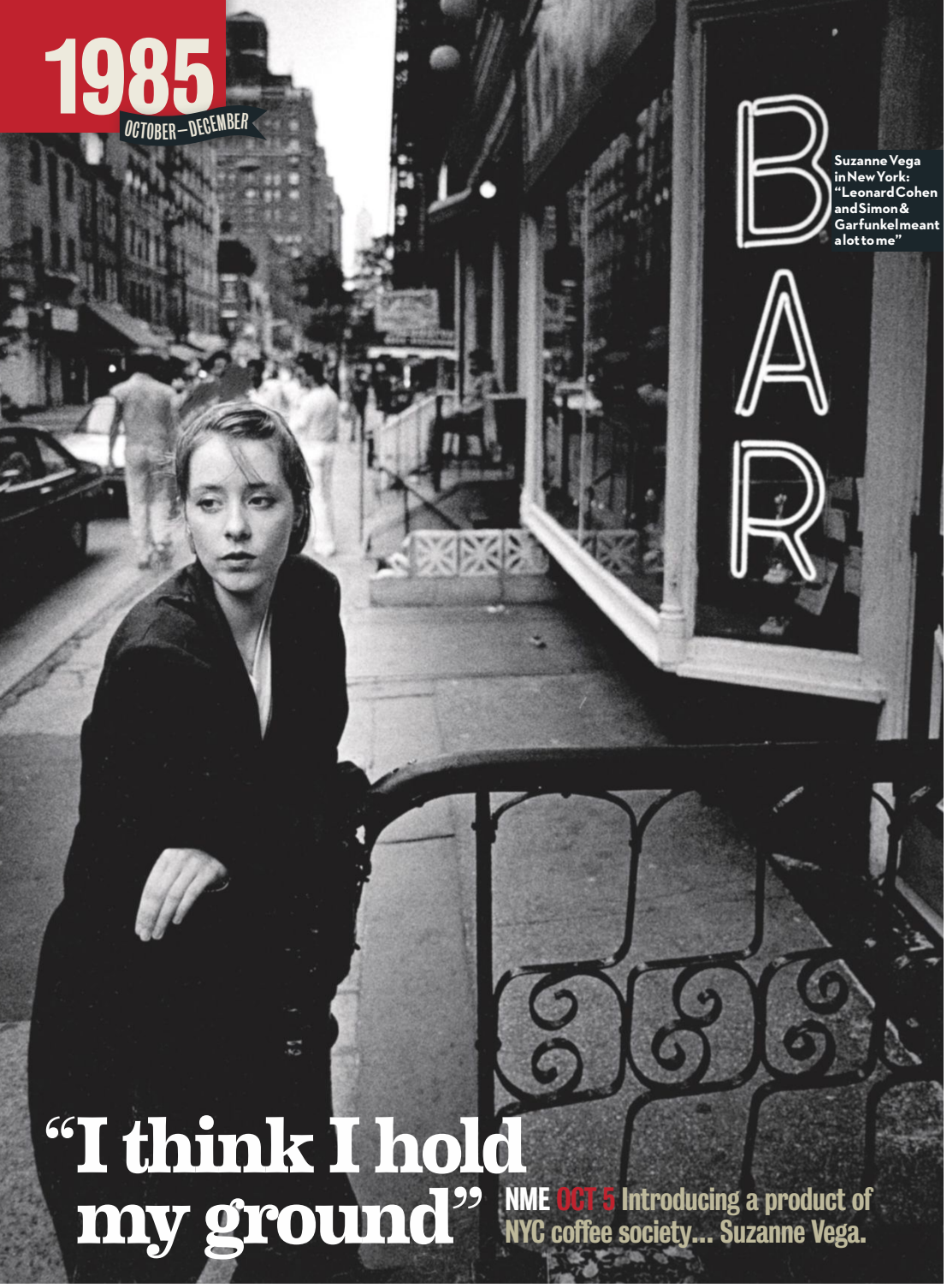
Wot, no *Songs For Swinging Lovers?*

NME NOV 30 NME names the 100 (actually 99...) best albums of all time.

1 **What's Going On** Marvin Gaye (1971)
2 **Astral Weeks** Van Morrison (1968)
3 **Highway 61 Revisited** Bob Dylan (1965)
4 **The Clash** The Clash (1977)
5 **Marquee Moon** Television (1977)
6 **Swordfishtrombones** Tom Waits (1983)
7 **The Band** The Band (1969)
8 **Blonde On Blonde** Bob Dylan (1966)
9 **John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band** John Lennon (1970)
10 **Unknown Pleasures** Joy Division (1979)
11 **Revolver** The Beatles (1966)
12 **The Sun Collection** Elvis Presley (1975)
13 **Never Mind The Bollocks...** Sex Pistols (1977)
14 **Forever Changes** Love (1967)
15 **Low** David Bowie (1977)
16 **The Velvet Underground And Nico** The Velvet Underground (1967)
17 **Solid Gold** James Brown (1977)
18 **Horses** Patti Smith (1975)
19 **Live At The Apollo** James Brown (1963)
20 **Pet Sounds** The Beach Boys (1966)
21 **Kind Of Blue** Miles Davis (1959)
22 **Bringing It All Back Home** Bob Dylan (1965)
23 **Otis Blue** Otis Redding (1966)
24 **The Doors** The Doors (1967)
25 **Exile On Main Street** The Rolling Stones (1972)
26 **Anthology** The Temptations (1974)
27 **Greatest Hits** Aretha Franklin (1977)
28 **Are You Experienced** The Jimi Hendrix Experience (1967)
29 **The Modern Dance** Pere Ubu (1978)
30 **King Of The Delta Blues Singers** Robert Johnson (1972)
31 **Imperial Bedroom** Elvis Costello & The Attractions (1982)
32 **Anthology** Smokey Robinson & The Miracles (1974)
33 **The Beatles** The Beatles (1968)
34 **Searching For The Young Soul Rebels** Dexys Midnight Runners (1980)
35 **White Light/White Heat** The Velvet Underground (1968)
36 **Young Americans** David Bowie (1975)
37 **The Poet** Bobby Womack (1982)
38 **Trans-Europe Express** Kraftwerk (1977)
39 **Darkness On The Edge Of Town** Bruce Springsteen (1979)
40 **This Years Model** Elvis Costello & The Attractions (1978)
41 **Another Green World** Brian Eno (1975)
42 **Trout Mask Replica** Captain Beefheart & The Magic Band (1969)
43 **The Man Machine** Kraftwerk (1978)
44 **The Mothership Connection** Parliament (1975)
45 **The Cream Of Al Green** Al Green (1980)
46 **Let's Get It On** Marvin Gaye (1973)
47 **There's A Riot Going On** Sly And The Family Stone (1971)
48 **Rocket To Russia** The Ramones (1977)
49 **Greatest Hits** Sly And The Family Stone (1970)
50 **Big 16** The Impressions (1965)
51 **Blood On The Tracks** Bob Dylan (1974)
52 **Alan Vega/Martin Rev** Suicide (1980)
53 **Another Music In A Different Kitchen** Buzzcocks (1978)
54 **Closer** Joy Division (1980)
55 **Mad Not Mad** Madness (1985)
56 **For Your Pleasure** Roxy Music (1973)
57 **The Scream** Siouxie & The Banshees (1978)
58 **The Harder They Come** Soundtrack Featuring Jimmy Cliff (1972)
59 **Entertainment!** Gang Of Four (1980)
60 **The Velvet Underground** The Velvet Underground (1969)
61 **3+3** The Isley Brothers (1973)
62 **The Hissing Of Summer Lawns** Joni Mitchell (1975)
63 **"Heroes"** David Bowie (1977)
64 **Meat Is Murder** The Smiths (1985)
65 **Station To Station** David Bowie (1976)
66 **Clear Spot** Captain Beefheart And The Magic Band (1972)
67 **Get Happy!** Elvis Costello & The Attractions (1980)
68 **Fear Of Music** Talking Heads (1979)
69 **Lust For Life** Iggy Pop (1977)
70 **Berlin** Lou Reed (1973)
71 **20 Greatest Hits** Buddy Holly & The Crickets (1967)
72 **Music From Big Pink** The Band (1968)
73 **Hard Day's Night** The Beatles (1964)
74 **Roxy Music** Roxy Music (1972)
75 **Leave Home** The Ramones (1977)
76 **A Love Supreme** John Coltrane (1957)
77 **Golden Decade Vol 1** Chuck Berry (1972)
78 **The Greatest Hits** Jackie Wilson (1969)
79 **In A Silent Way** Miles Davis (1969)
80 **Stranded** Roxy Music (1973)
81 **Talking Heads '77** Talking Heads (1977)
82 **The Correct Use Of Soap** Magazine (1980)
83 **Born In The USA** Bruce Springsteen (1983)
84 **Court And Spark** Joni Mitchell (1974)
85 **Strange Days** The Doors (1967)
86 **More Songs About Buildings And Food** Talking Heads (1978)
87 **LA Woman** The Doors (1971)
88 **Chess Masters** Howling Wolf (1981)
89 **Armed Forces** Elvis Costello & The Attractions (1979)
90 **Steve McQueen** Prefab Sprout (1985)
91 **Paris 1919** John Cale (1973)
92 **Forward Onto Zion** The Abyssinians (1977)
93 **My Aim Is True** Elvis Costello (1977)
94 **Rattlesnakes** Lloyd Cole & The Commotions (1984)
95 **Best Of** The Beach Boys (1968)
96 **King Tubbys Meets Rockers Uptown** Augustus Pablo (1976)
97 **Rubber Soul** The Beatles (1965)
98 **Suicide** Suicide (1977)
99 **The Undertones** The Undertones (1979)



Suzanne Vega in New York: "Leonard Cohen and Simon & Garfunkel meant a lot to me"

"I think I hold my ground"

NME OCT 5 Introducing a product of NYC coffee society... Suzanne Vega.

I'D NEVER BEEN to a coffee shop in New York's Greenwich Village before, but the Paradise was just as I'd imagined such a place to be from movies like *Annie Hall*. Loft people idle away the afternoon's magic hour, and yuppie voices rise career-wise over the strains of piped Mozart and Vivaldi. Mmmmm, nice.

Yet here was I invading this haven from Manhattan's street hassle with a little hatchetry on my mind. Parked at a spindly window table between myself and the towering Derek Ridgers sits the sylph-like Suzanne Vega, siren of the Nouvelle Vague of acoustic introspection.

Suzanne's a Cancer, a lunar child who swims with the tides and captures the secret rhythms that swell and eddy beneath life's surface. Sister moon stuff, tra la la, and while there's a bit of that in me, there's only enough to make me doubt momentarily my macho judgement that, yes, Suzanne Vega sings beautifully wistful music, but the words! My dear! Viewed in bollock-naked print, Suzanne's world of interiorisation usually summons up but eight clanking letters –

"Precious," she sighs, "is a word I hear a lot..."

"I knew I wanted to be a folk singer from the time I was 16, partly because it was the music I had been brought up on. My father – he's a novelist, Ed Vega – had played guitar, mostly blues: Leadbelly, "House Of The Rising Sun". They were both very young when they married – my mother had me when she was 18 and she'd had all four of us by the time she was 24. My parents being so young, we had all kinds of music in the house from the '60s – Dylan, Laura Nyro, a lot of stuff. I liked Leonard Cohen and Simon & Garfunkel – these things meant a lot to me.

> **"It's my goal to write songs with more breadth, be less restrained and more outspoken"**

"I remember being eight or nine years old and feeling this kind of climate of, 'Oh, if we can just follow Joan Baez and sing "We Shall Overcome", then we shall overcome.' Then all of a sudden the '70s came and it was, like, that really wasn't good enough. You can sing 'Blowin' In The Wind' – and 'Blowin' In The Wind' is a great song – but it doesn't save you from your political situation, so a kind of cynicism crept in, a feeling of futility.

"And I was very surprised to find myself in the middle '70s, all by myself there. Me and someone else were the only ones playing acoustic guitar in high school. I felt very isolated.

"I guess somewhere in the back of my mind I had the myth of a solitary person jumping a freight train and exploring the country and just having an acoustic guitar. And that did not include fancy costumes and making yourself a cartoon character."

Well, I guess Madonna can rest easy now. But if La Ciccone's cartoon-character star is in the ascendant right now, so too is the reaction of another section of the record-buying public. I'll bet that the purchasers of the 26-year-old Suzanne's eponymously titled debut album will be slotting it alongside *Born In The USA* as two sides of the same coin of authenticity, minted circa 1971 and suddenly valuable again. That authenticity, a caring, sharing co-op of roots and attitude, and the solidarity of the confessional.

But where, say, Bruce animates his preoccupations through self-projection into cinematic vignettes, Suzanne bares her soul far more obviously. The letter "I" flourishes in her stanzas like the noble redwoods of her Californian birthplace; the famous words penned about Joni Mitchell by *Village Voice* guru Robert Christgau in 1973 spring to mind: "In a male performer such intense self-concern would be an egotistical cop-out. In a woman it is an act of defiance."

Suzanne pauses for thought.

"It's not an excuse to become so totally self-involved that you write things that are only interesting to yourself, but there is some truth in that.

"A man is more used to having power and using it and seeing its effect in the outside world. Dylan can say, '*Come gather round people wherever you are!*', because he has some expectation that when he gets up on the soapbox and says that, then people will. Whereas a woman is much less likely to feel that because, I guess, you don't see a woman being president. If you are a woman you can maybe expect to have

DEREK RIDGERS

some power in your personal life. Maybe, and not always effectively.

"I think I'm aware of the wider world, but I tend to write from a very individual point of view that's most human, so that in that way I affect other people, which I suppose in itself might be a political stance. I don't always write about myself; sometimes I try to write from different characters' points of view and let the audience become involved and figure it out for themselves."

Your songs embody a passivity which I find irksome because it's clothed in a language of fey self-absorption long familiar from Joni Mitchell's *Blue* and onwards through the Me Decade.

"That's really interesting. I don't consider myself to be an aggressive person. Erm... I think I hold my ground. I've spent a lifetime holding my ground. It's very difficult for me to be overtly aggressive. Even as a child, if I was angry, I would withdraw.

"In my family there was frequently a lot of emotional upheaval, and I was the one who'd say, 'Well, OK, someone has to make the dinner tonight and I guess it's going to be me.' I find myself in a world where everything's thrown up in the air and I have to make some kind of organisation out of all this.

"Another thing I also enjoyed about Dylan and Leonard Cohen, they were symbolic. They could describe a landscape where other people could join in. When Dylan sings 'I' in a song, he's talking for Everyman. When I say 'I' in a song, people say, 'Oh, she's talking about herself again.' Or some people do. I would like to get beyond that, when I say 'I', to mean 'all of us'."

At this point, dear reader, you'll be wondering why, if her manifest good intentions fail to translate into words to be clutched to the bosom forever, Suzanne Vega can command a page in *NME* and hours of brow-furrowing by my good self. Well, the pleasure to be had from her plaintive music and lovely voice (her band is also excellent) approaches, though not imitates, that of the Lorelei of Lotus Land, Rickie Lee Jones...

"It's not a conscious thing. I was aware that I phrase like Laurie Anderson, very soft-spoken and self-conscious. Rickie Lee Jones pours out a lot more, whereas I'm more busy organising. I like to get everything into some kind of perfect shape, without all kinds of loose ends. I prefer to find the heart of something, songs that are crystalline.

"The Police songs are like that for me, when they're right on like 'Wrapped Around Your Finger', a really great song with a wholeness and completion. And some of Bertold Brecht's songs are like that for me too, a complete landscape, a complete picture, a complete point of view. I think that also has to do with my training as dancer – the less movement you use, the better dancer you are.

"It's my goal to write songs with more breadth to them, be less restrained and more outspoken. This is something I've been thinking about a lot as I've gone through the country and realised how small my corner of the world really is and how big America is. Touring the country really changed something for me – I've gotten arm muscles now where I didn't used to have any." *Mat Snow*

SHRINK RAP!
MIKE SCOTT

Mike Scott: life altered by CS Lewis

MM NOV 30 Head Waterboy Mike Scott bares his psyche to the *Maker*.

Patti Smith
A wonderful woman. She was exactly what I wanted to hear in 1976. "A Girl Called Johnny" was sort of about her. She's also one of the bravest artists I can think of, because she split when she was doing well... She just decided she didn't want to do it any more and that was it.

CND
I haven't thought about it for a while. I'm not sure what to think... but I like Bruce Kent... I can't say anything bad about him.

Another Pretty Face
That's the past.

The Clash
I quite like the single, I'm a sucker for Strummer's voice, you see. Always have been. I've always liked The Clash.

Live Aid
I was there, in the audience. It was a really inspiring day... I've never seen an audience so inspired by anything in my life. Even when there was all this really boring music in the afternoon. I went home after the show and watched the American side of it on television and went to bed at dawn and the thunder was cracking in the sky. The '80s began with Live Aid. You know the way that most decade's peak in the middle, well the '80s began with Live Aid.

Bowie
He was one of those who knew exactly what he was doing at Live Aid. He's really cool, that one. I've always liked him. I used to be in a group and we specialised in Bowie songs... We used to do about 12 of his songs a set.

Hotels
The Gramercy Park in New York is quite good. And the Portobello in London.

New York
Yes. I have a lot of friends there. I like being there. But I have nothing sparklingly original to say about the place.

Television
One of the best things about Live Aid was the positive power of television... you know, rather than just the Big Brother thing. But I'm not a big telly watcher – I never turn it on. The only things I look at are *Newsnight*, especially when there are by-elections on, and *Taxi* and sometimes *Panorama* and *World In Action*.

U2
Fine people. Powerful group. They have a fantastic power over their audience and they're mature enough to handle their responsibilities.

England
Funnily enough, I feel quite glad to be back in England after being in America for some time. I've been walking round London today and I've really enjoyed just being here again.

Kahlil Gilbran
I've read *The Prophet* if that's what you mean. It's a pretty good lyrical book, but I'm not a huge fan or anything.

Ireland
I love Ireland.

The charts
I never know what's in the charts, I'm not a chart watcher. However, I do know that we're in the charts this week. It means a lot of people are hearing the song, so that's good, that's what you always want anyway. It also means that more people have bought this single ["The Whole Of The Moon"] than have bought anything else The Waterboys have ever recorded. I'm not unhappy about that.

CS Lewis
I *knew* you were going to ask that. He wrote the Narnia stories, which I read and re-read and they altered my life. He wrote wonderful books and was a great man.

Touring
I've only got boring things to say about touring – you know, how much I love it.

Sigue Sigue Sputnik
Good luck to them. Do you know if they are ever going to make a record?

Record companies
Sorry, no real bad experiences. Not yet, anyway.

Politics
For the politicians, it's all about competition... that's why politics never really solves anything. I was a member of the Labour party at one time, but I'm not interested any more... It's a waste of time.

Bowie: "cool"

LYNN GOLDSMITH / GETTY; DAVE HOGAN / GETTY

"It's better to burn hard than to rot"

With his reputation on a high, a tangential interview reveals a lot about the unique worldview and oddball technique of TOM WAITS. On the release of *Rain Dogs*, Tom talks white socks, neuroscience and his new guitarist, Keith Richards. "We met in a woman's lingerie shop..."

— NME OCTOBER 19 —

"**SO THEY TELL** me the shows we're doing in London are sold out already. I can hardly believe that."

Well, *Swordfishtrombones* had quite a big impact, Tom.

"Mmm, but there's the other side of that, it doesn't last too long. Everything is temporary – they pump you up for a little while, dye your hair, see you in a different shape. It goes around for a while and comes back down again. It's not something you can really build on."

Are you nervous about coming to London?

"I am, I'm scared to death. Jesus, I'll need a bullet-proof vest. I need a new hat, a new suit – I can't go over there in a raincoat. I've told the band to smarten up, too. They're more attuned to the stuff I'm doing now, but they're also capable of doing some pre-*Swordfish* stuff but with a different slant to it.

"So I think it will be OK, I hope it will be OK. I will have to talk to my sax player, Ralph Carney, about his white socks, the white socks and the navy uniform; I'm not sure about that.

"Ralph, I haven't been able to confront you about this »

BLEDDYN BUTCHER / REX FEATURES

Tom Waits in New York's Lower West Side, September 1985

face to face, so I'm using this opportunity to talk to you through the press – we must do something about the white socks."

THE ONLY TIME I've seen Tom Waits live was in London, the Victoria Apollo in 1981. The appearance came just after the release of *Heartattack And Vine*, notable for its move into bone-crushing electric blues. Waits' ability to rework the sleazy nightclub setting had already been proven by the double live album *Nighthawks At The Diner*, but in this large auditorium his stand-up bass, drum and piano set-up couldn't really carry. I left before the end.

"It's kinda hard to do that on a big stage, the basic economics of touring kept me in tow there."

How did you overcome that problem?

"The new band is all midgets, they share a room, they don't want to be paid for their work. They all have a basic persecution complex and they want me to punish them for things that have happened in their past life, and I have agreed – I've just signed something."

Your generosity is quite touching.

"No, they're all good chaps, most of them have never been in jail, though I'm not sure about Ralph Carney."

It wasn't the best time to interview Tom Waits; he was in the middle of arranging to shoot a video for either "Singapore" or "Cemetery Polka" off the new *Rain Dogs* album, he was rehearsing a live band, finalising details for his first major film role (to be shot in New Orleans later in the year), arranging the staging of the musical *Frank's Wild Years* (to open in Chicago after Christmas), and he'd just become a father for the third time.

We meet in a diner on New York's Lower West Side. Waits arrives a little late, wearing an old '40s Burberry, heavy-duty denims and unbuckled motorcycle boots. The face is grey, the features weasel-like and his hair bears red traces of henna dye. He looks haggard and a little shy at first, eyeing us cautiously as we exchange handshakes. Today is Sunday and the Waits family are observing tradition – the interview is squeezed between babysitting and a visit from the in-laws. His wife, Kathleen Brennan, is the girl eulogised on *Swordfishtrombones*' "Johnsburg, Illinois" and a scriptwriter at Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope studios.

"We've got three children now – Ajax, Edith and Montgomery. I must get them enrolled in military school immediately. I see it like *Tobacco Road*, the old hillbilly movie, we'll all be heading down that long path together."

A Tom Waits interview is not a place to come looking for serious analysis. Waits has sung of the displaced, the dimestore loser and the hobo for so long that he seems to have taken on a composite persona, drawn from his crazy cast of characters. Although kind and respectful, he can't resist turning the conversation around with an enigmatic metaphor or some brazen bullshitting. Whenever necessary he'll substitute an entertaining lie for a boring truth.

"Music paper interviews, I hate to tell ya, but two days after they're printed they're lining the trashcan. They're not binding, they're not locked away in a vault somewhere tying you to your word."

The Waits case history is necessarily littered with truths, half-truths and downright lies. He used to tell writers he was born in the back of a truck travelling though South LA on December 7, 1949. In high school he played in a soul group but dropped out to play accordion in a polka band. He drifted through a variety of jobs – "a jack-off of all trades" – and was working in a Hollywood diner when he met West Coast manager Herb Cohen at the turn of the '70s.

He signed for Asylum, then a small independent rather than a branch of WEA. After releasing a few promising albums, he found his true artistry on *Small Change* and the essential *Foreign Affairs* and *Blue Valentine*.

As an arranger and tunesmith working the cool-blue jazz sphere, Waits was peerless, but his unique power came from contrasting those talents with his coarse gutbucket growl and mesmerising wordplay. Waits mined the postwar faultline of Kerouac and the beats, focusing on the loners and losers that littered America's highways and byways.

Foreign Affairs had "Potter's Field", its epic atmospherics – all deathly strings and orchestral cadences – straight out of Sam Fuller's classic noir B-movie *Pick UP On South Street*, and "I Never Talk To Strangers", a divine duet with Bette Midler, recreating an idiom everyone thought died with Tin Pan Alley. He would later revisit the territory with Crystal Gayle on the *One From The Heart* soundtrack.

"I guess I did borrow a lot to do stuff like that. But it's good to borrow; borrowing implies that you're going to give back. That's the way all music works – you take a little something from here, you bring it over there and pretty soon it finds its way back."

October 16, 1985: appearing on Channel 4 pop show *The Tube*

REX FEATURES

Blue Valentine has the Waits song I keep coming back to. "Kentucky Avenue" starts as fanciful childhood reminiscence and builds to a climax that is at once absurd and heartbreaking.

"Childhood is very important to me as a writer. I think the things that happen then, the way you perceive them and remember them in later life, have a very big effect on what you do later on.

"That one came over a little dramatic, a little puffed up, but when I was 10 my best friend was called Kipper. He had polio and was in a wheelchair – we used to race each other to the bus stop."

His relationship with WEA turned sour when he tried to release *Swordfishtrombones* as the follow-up to *Heartattack And Vine*.

"They heard it but they didn't recognise it, so amidst all the broken glass and barbed wire I crawled out between the legs of the presidents. It was the big shakedown at Gimble's – business, I guess."

It closed a chapter in Waits' life – he moved out of Hollywood's infamous Tropicana Motel, split with Cohen and his girlfriend Rickie Lee Jones, and signed to Island. The '70s hadn't been an altogether easy ride for Waits – constantly on the road, often as a stadium support to an incongruous Frank Zappa. It's rumoured he employed a $250-a-week stooge to bawl at backstage and came close to being ruined by the lifestyle he drew on. Certainly his business was not always conducted wisely; publishing rights for some of his greatest compositions fell into other hands.

"Maybe that's why I write so many songs now; the songs I write now belong to me, not someone in the Bronx. I did not stay abreast of what was happening to me. I'm happier to be on a small label, Blackwell is artistic, a philanthropist. You can sit and talk with him and you don't feel you're at Texaco or Heineken or Budweiser. There's something operating here that has a brain, curiosity and imagination."

Swordfishtrombones introduced a demented, exotic parade band to deal with the musical junk lying in American attics and basements. *Rain Dogs* continues where it left off, and though Waits is writing about the same sort of characters he has for the past 15 years, the situations he places them in differ wildly – maybe they've been transplanted to a dusty western ghost town where the saloon-bar pianist never stops, or cast adrift on the Titanic while the band play mariachi tangos and crazy polkas. He can still play it straight, too – dig the country-blue bitters of "Blind Love", the lonesome lullaby "Hang Down Your Head" – but in general the reassembling of musical influences is perfectly in keeping with the new images and rhythms of his own language.

Rain Dogs is the first Waits LP made entirely in New York; the bleakness and claustrophobia never far from the surface bears this out. He's lived in nine different places since moving here – at the moment he resides between the New York State Armoury and National Guard recruiting centre and the Salvation Army headquarters.

> "I don't want to romanticise liquor to the point of ridiculousness"

Why did you come here?
"I came here for the shoes; it's a real good town for shoes. It amazes me – I think it's a good time for music when it's a good time for shoes. You look in the shoe store and you see them trimmed down with the points just so – they thrill me, really."

When was the last time shoes were so good?
"You wait 15 years, it's a long wait. In the meantime you go where you have to – Fairfax, 36th and Downing, 9th and Hennepin in Minneapolis."

When you're putting together your group, is a sense of humour important?
"That's how you audition them, you tell them a joke and if they don't laugh then it's hit the bricks, pal."

You used to be noted for a "professional drunk" image – has that changed?
"Sincerely, I don't want to romanticise liquor to the point of ridiculousness."

Would you like a drink now?
"Maybe I should have a beer, what do you think? I mean, what time is it here? I'll have a Beck's."

You've got your younger listeners to think of; you've got to set an example.
"Yah, setting an example. Well I don't think there's anything wrong with a little sherry before retiring, read a little Balzac and then lay out. I don't drink and drive. I enjoy a little cocktail before supper, who doesn't?"

America seems to be swamped with heroes like never before – bulky bull-headed killing machines like Stallone, Norris and Schwarzenegger are packing them in in the movie theatres on Times Square. It's a complete contrast to the characters you create on *Rain Dogs*.
"A hero ain't nothing but a sandwich. It's tough on the heroes, all they really want to do is strip you of your name, rank, and serial number. It's like a hanging, a burlesque, it's spooky. They have you all dressed up with a hat on, makeup and a stick that goes up the back of your neck. Then they take a 12-gauge shotgun and blow your head off."

You worked with Sylvester Stallone once in the movie *Paradise Alley*. Have you seen *Rambo*?
"No I haven't, I don't want to get drawn into something here just because I did some work once because I needed the bread.

"America has been looking for somewhere to put the Vietnam war for so long. We're making movies to help us forget. You hear the budget for the film was so many millions of bucks, and here's this guy with all his muscles and a big machine gun. But the veterans were treated like dogmeat. The film budget was so many millions of dollars and they get $100 a month."

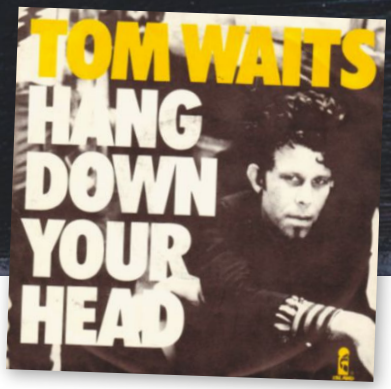
How did you avoid the draft during the '60s?
"I was in Israel on a kibbutz. No I wasn't, that's a lie. I was in Washington, sir. I was in the White House as an aide. I got excused, the way anyone would get as note from school: 'Dear Mr President, Tom is sick today and won't be able to come along.'"

Can you remember why you became a musician in the first place?
"I couldn't get into medical school; the administration at the time made it difficult for me."

I heard you wanted to do neurosurgery.
"I wanted to help out, I wanted to combine yardwork and medicine. When I was young I wanted to be a policeman – I liked the uniform, I wanted a bit of authority – but that changed too."

The influence and approach of the late Harry Partch (a sometime hobo and creator of a new musical notation played on his own range of instruments) is evident on *Swordfishtrombones*. What about his work appealed to you?
"I have a friend called Francis Thuum who played the Partch chromelodeon. He lives down by the beach in a place called Leisure World. He drinks the Ballantine's, loves the Scotch, the 12-year-old single malt. He drinks plenty of it and it's got him into plenty of trouble.

"Anyway, he showed me Partch had an instrument called the blowboy, it sounded like a train whistle; it was a train whistle, only it was *his* train whistle. It blew from out of bellows, reeds and organ pipes; he could play it with his foot like a pump organ and go 'hooway, hooway'. I swear it was a sound that would break your heart. They said in a little documentary »



"New York is like a weapon... it's intense": messing about down by the Hudson river, September 1985

BLEDDYN BUTCHER / REX FEATURES

that the instruments he made were so beautiful, they looked like skeletons.

"I guess I just got more curious, I was getting lazy. I'm just trying to find different ways of saying the same thing. I used to hear everything with a tenor saxophone; I had a very particular musical wardrobe. I've opened up a bit more."

Do you think you can tell a lot about a country from the things it discards?
"I guess you can, I don't know. Everything in the United States is made so that – I vaant eet and I vaant eet all now. People just don't have the time, what do you do? They want things fast, but it's like an aquarium – you sit waiting and it all comes by again. I like to mix it; you can learn something from everything."

Your writing seems to follow a similar path – you're neither a curator nor a documentor. The world you create jumbles memory, reality and imagination to make its own reality. How the listener applies that to their reality is up to them.
"I think a lot of that comes from being in New York. Everything is heightened; you're looking through that into this, beyond this into that. You get picked up by a Chinese cab driver in the Jewish district, go to a Spanish restaurant where you listen to a Japanese tango band and eat Brazilian food. It's all blended.

"New York's been settled by people that are very separate in a way. They retain their own culture, its rules, religions and customs. You know when you pass over the border from one into the other."

For you as a musician, is it all up for grabs?
"Not so much to be used, I just try to enjoy. There's a place where Nigeria will lapse into Louisiana; there's things about music that happen spontaneously and you move into places that would otherwise have no connection. If you play a certain rhythm and move it a little, it becomes something else; move it back and it becomes a Carpathian waltz; move it further and you have a Gamelan trajectory coming in. It creates its own geography.

"I overdub now, I'm more paranoid. When I was working on two-track I did everything straight. Or maybe that means I'm less paranoid now, because I'm not afraid to use it. But you can't get any ideas from machinery."

***Rain Dogs* was written at the same time as the *Frank's Wild Years* musical. Did they overlap?**
"I tried to keep them separate. *Rain Dogs* is like… well, I don't want to sound too dramatic, but I wanted there to be a connection between the tracks. I was going to call it 'Beautiful Train Wrecks' or 'Evening Train Wrecks'. Sometimes I close my eyes real hard and I see a picture of what I want. That song 'Singapore' started like that, Richard Burton with a bottle of festival brandy preparing to go on board ship. I tried to make my voice like his – "*In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king*" – I took that from Orwell, I think."

Which book?
"*Mary Poppins*, one of the big ones."

Films and childhood seem important to your work. Where did you first see films when you were a kid?
"It was called the Globe Theatre and they had some unusual double bills. I saw *The Pawnbroker* on the same bill as *101 Dalmatians* when I was 11. I didn't understand it, and now I think the programme director must have been mentally disturbed or had a sick sense of humour.

"I liked going to movies, but I didn't get lost in them. Some people would rather spend time in the movies than anywhere else. On certain days I would watch 10 movies, spend all day from 10 in the morning to midnight going from movie to movie. But then it's the world outside that becomes the film; the time in-between takes on a very weird arrangement, that's what you watch, not the movies."

A lot of the songs on *Rain Dogs* seem to be about death.
"'Cemetery Polka' is a family album. A lot of my relatives are farmers, they're eccentric, aren't everyone's relatives? Maybe it was stupid to put them on the album, because now I get irate calls saying, 'Tom, how can you talk about your Aunt Maime and your Uncle Biltmore like that?' 'But Mum,' I say, 'they did make a million during World War Two and you'll never see any of it. It's time someone exposed them."

> "Sometimes I close my eyes real hard and I see a picture of what I want"

How did Keith Richards come to be on the album?
"We're relatives, I didn't realise it. We met in a woman's lingerie shop; we were buying brassieres for our wives. They had a little place at the back there where you could have a drink, two cups at a time.

"No, he's been borrowing money from me for so long that I had to put a stop to it. He's a gentleman; he came into the studio and took his hat off and all these birds flew out."

"Union Square" is great – it sounds like the Stones haven't been able to for years.
"I was going to throw that song out. I said, 'Call the dustman, this one's chewing on the dead.' But somebody said, 'There's something there.' 'Hell,' I said, 'there isn't.' Then he came in – on the clock he stands with his head at 3 and his arm at 10. I said how can a man stand like that without falling over, unless he has a 200lb-test fishing line suspending him from the ceiling? It was like something out of *Arthur* – he comes in with his guitar valet and it's, 'Oh Keef, shall we try the Rickenbacker?'

How did "Frank's Wild Years" turn into a musical?
"The song was like a fortune cookie; after I wrote it I thought, 'What happened to this guy?' Everybody knows guys like that, people you haven't seen in a long time – what happens to these people? What happened to John Chrisswicky? Oh Jesus, John's second wife left him and he went to work in a slaughterhouse for a while. Then he was in a rendering unit. Of course, his dad was always in the wine business; that didn't interest John. I hear he ended up as a mercenary soldier.

"People go through those permutations in different stages of their life; perceived by someone else it can look strange. I imagined Frank along those lines. Y'see, my folks split up when I was a kid and… Hey look, let me give you $100 and I'll lie down on the couch over there, you take notes and see if we can't get to the bottom of this."

How does it feel to be getting older and seeing your influence spread? The Pogues write about "Rain Dogs" in London; I'm sure they'd acknowledge you as an inspiration.
"Well, that's great, that's what it's all about. You break a little trail, you come through to here, and you leave some things behind.

"The Pogues I like, they're ragged and full of it. They seem to come on traditional and eccentric. They shout – I like the shouting. I like Agnes Bernelle, Falling James and The Leaving Trains, Jack Drake and The Black Ducks, they play a drunken reverie, no instruments, they just bang on things. I like some of that metal music, making music out of things that come to hand."

Have you got any advice for would-be musicians?
"Champagne for your real friends, real pain for your sham friends. I tell them it's good to write on instruments you don't understand."

No jolly-ups around the old joanna?
"It's firewood as far as I'm concerned. Slowly I've started peeling the boards off until there's nothing left but metal, strings and ivory."

Many of your prime influences were self-destructive. Do you feel a sense of duty not to get ensnared in that myth?
"I think it's better to burn hard than to rot, I think that's right. I don't really feel a sense of duty, I'm not in the army. Things that you write about have been written about before, so I don't feel I'm breaking new ground or anything. All you can do is listen to the things that are of value to you and try to find a place for yourself.

"I don't want to sound too serious here, but it's like when you're together with people for a long time and talking about the things only you know. That must be the very sad thing about getting very old and all your friends die, and you're talking to some guy and he's nodding and saying, 'Yeah, yeah,' and you're thinking, 'Yeah, but he doesn't really know.'"

How would you like to be remembered?
"Jesus Christ, I'm 19 years old and you're asking me how I want to be remembered. On my gravestone I want it to say 'I told you I was sick'. Achievement is for the senators and scholars. At one time I had ambitions, but I had them removed by a doctor in Buffalo. It started as a cyst, it grew under my arm and I had to have new shirts made, it was awful. But I have them in a jar at home now."

SOMETIME LATER WE'RE driving around New York looking for a suitable photo location. Down towards the river the apartment blocks get more dilapidated, the wind howls and we watch a bum foraging in a litter bin.

"There's that guy, I haven't seen him in ages, I wonder where he's been," says Tom, like he'd just seen an old friend. He tells me he thought Paul Young's version of "Soldier's Things" was a little puffed up, but "it's always nice when someone covers your songs. Some of them are orphans, they need a home." He talks about leaving New York.

"As you get older, the things it was once important to have around you become less so, especially with children. New York is like a weapon, you live with all these contradictions and it's intense, sometimes unbearable. It's a place where you think you should be doing more about what you see around you, a place where the deadline to get the picture of the bum outside your apartment becomes more important than his deadline to get a crust or a place to sleep, which is a real deadline.

"You see things like the $400 shoe followed by the $500 ballgown stepping into the pool of blood from the bum that was killed the night before. That's what I was trying to get in that song 'Clap Hands' – "*You can always get a millionaire to shovel all the coal*", because millionaires like to go places that are downbeat, that aren't so chi-chi."

Where would you like to live, Tom?
"Kansas, it's a good place to dream. You wake up in the morning, look out the window and don't see anything, you make it all up. I'd have a porch, a mean dog and a 12-gauge shotgun. You wouldn't throw your baseball into my yard, buddy; you'd never see it again." *Gavin Martin* •

November 4, 1985: on stage at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam

FRANS SCHELLEKENS / GETTY

"What the fuck is a hippy?"

Very much without critical permission, THE CULT are picking up a large following. On TV with their singles, in the flesh they face a press who think they are "the muppets of goth". Not fair, they say. "What we've been through as individuals can be very complicated."

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 26 —

"I'M A NAIVE, romantic kid. I'm supposed to be some middle-class drop-out who's quite well educated, but I've got me 'ead up me ass and I just walk around going 'everything's beautiful'."

I think we'd better start again…

"Kids take us on a more serious level than they do a lot of other bands and a lot of journalists seem to find that very annoying. They seem to think that what we do is shrouded in a mysticism that we create in order to hide a basic lack of understanding, but it's not as complicated as that. We're not that clever. We're just two lads from the north, right? We're doing what comes naturally. 'E makes a noise with 'is mouth and I play guitar. That's what we do."

I think we'd better start again…

Ian Astbury's one of those people who's embroidered his pretty uneventful youth into a diary of momentous incidents and traumatic turning points, and told it to so many people so many times that he probably now believes it.

"The first gig I ever done was filmed for TV, my fifth ever gig with Southern Death Cult was reviewed by the press. Anything I've done, people have wanted to know what it's all about. I just find it so amusing that all these people keep slagging us off, and I couldn't give a shit about it, I'm not bothered. People have tried to pound us into the ground, but they just can't get a hold of it."

When Ian Astbury talks, he reminds me of Nick Rhodes – thick but authoritative, intoning the most commonplace truism or embarrassing drivel with such haughtiness that you'd believe he believes he's imparting some real pearl of wisdom.

Billy Duffy's different but the same – he's confident but sharper; he listens whereas Ian, for all the community spiel he's about to »

BLEDDYN BUTCHER / REX FEATURES

"We just do what we believe in": Cult frontman Ian Astbury in 1985

unleash, exhibits, in his own favoured condemnation of others, "a very closed mind". For someone so intent on letting it be known he's intent on learning, Ian actually never listens; he just stares away into a more important world of his own and sometimes deigns to descend to my level to say his peace piece. I'd say he was stoned but….

"The funniest thing about the music business is that the people who are most into the rock'n'roll cliche lifestyle are the ones whose public image is the least like that. We don't take drugs, we've never done it. That's just a personal way this band are, and I suppose it's a paradox. We're a rock band – we've been saying that for quite a while now and it wasn't too acceptable a year and a half ago, it was like putting your head in a guillotine. The times have maybe changed a little bit now."

I think we'd better start again…

The Cult are here, now, today, on *Top Of The Pops*, for better or worse, and every time it affects me I think of that handiest of phrases: Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Or some such.

And The Cult. The Cult are a rock band with accoutrements, aren't they? A swagger away from Black Sabbath. Something so old that they're new. The rock of ages. "Everything in this world right now is fast, fast, fast," Ian informs me, fiddling with his Led Zeppelin badge. "Fast food, fast TV, fast sex, fast everything. And people just skim on the surface all the time, and I think a lot of journalists look at us on the surface and pick up on certain things. Like the North American Indian thing – but that didn't just happen to me overnight, that was an experience that happened to me over five or six years. And hippies…"

Ah, hippies. Glad he brought it up. The new Cult album's called *Love*, and there are some out there who will tell you it's all you need. Not me. When we branded Ian as a spitter for Neil The Hippy, I wasn't exactly what you'd call blameless. And now here's this man who claims he's a boy, with hair halfway down his back, wearing a cowboy hat with an owl's feather in it, snakeskin cowboy boots with gold points and a Cure badge, staring into middle space and asking…

"What's a hippy? A lot of kids who come to see us haven't even got any conception of what a hippy is, except for maybe a teacher at school with long hair and a beard and some older kids have said, 'Oh, that's a hippy.' Y'know. I got called a hippy in the street by some 14-year-old kids the other day – I wonder where they got it from?"

I wonder…

"Look, what the fuck is a hippy? I think people see a hippy as some guy with long hair and glasses with a peace sign and flared trousers – it's just an image, like punk."

"What does punk mean now?" asks Billy, a less bolshie Idol. Here comes the answer: "It's a deprecating term. 'Let's go and laugh at the punks down the King's Road.'"

"It's that guy in the NatWest advert," says Ian. "The one with the Mohican haircut who spits at people and headbutts walls."

Ian's dead proud of having missed punk. He was in Canada at that time, in the army, and when he heard the Pistols, of course, it changed his life. He came over here, hung out in all the right places, met all the right people and picked up on the vibe after the event as it were. This, for some inexplicable reason, gives him a unique hindsight which prompts him to pontificate: "I think it's really nice what's happening now because it's unquantifiable. Because so many things have gone in the past, I think what we do is an amalgamation of all those different influences and it's gonna be a lot longer lasting."

"A lot of things have been in the negative," says Billy. "Maybe now is the time for… well, the positive. That's been a terrible word for a few years, almost frightening, but maybe what we're involved with is the first thing that's positive. Every other fashion – hippies, acid rock, punk – seemed to be incredibly against something. We're not necessarily against in that obvious way."

I think we'd better start again… The Cult were once Southern Death Cult, positive punks, whatever that ironic misnomer was meant to mean. Then they were Death Cult, burying their hearts at wounded knees protruding through jeans ripped just so. Then they were The Cult, a band going places playing turgid heavy metal with aspirations elsewhere. I've seen and heard it all before, but then…

"You take a walk in Newcastle and the kids are expressing a lot of things in the way they're dressing now, and they look to a band like us to be us, *we*, perhaps for the first time," says Billy. "In a sort of perverse way, they see us standing up to what they see as a very conservative music press. Kids think that the *NME* and *Melody Maker* are always going on about new funk rock and all this, that and the other, and when they go and see these bands, they're bored out of their minds. So they look around and think, 'Well, what the fuck is there that's exciting around here?' And they look to us. That's why you see kids in bright-green paisley shirts – they're looking for real bands that they can actually get excited about.

"I agree with the attitude that, in the late '60s, a certain group of people got so far up their own asses, they shit all over themselves," says Ian. "They did contradict themselves, but look what it produced, look at the imagination, look what it actually started. The fact that so many young people could go on the street and stop a war. The fact that you've got CND now. I mean, we're not into any political movements or anything, but at the same time, CND is a powerful cause, they're on about the same thing, they wanna fuckin' survive, they wanna have somewhere to live. All that was produced from the '60s – a lot of very positive things came out of it as well as a lot of negative self-indulgence."

If the '60s achieved anything, it created a youth in the sense that, before, you were a boy and then a man, or a girl and then a woman' there was nothing in-between, there was no fashion. In other words, the '60s made young people the most powerful force on Earth solely because it suited someone to do so. They were the biggest market.

"Young people, the most powerful? And so they should be," says Ian.

Any yet everything about The Cult screams for the extermination of the generation gap in order that lyrics such as "*It rained flowers when the music began*" ("Nirvana") or "*I'm on fire like a kiss from the lips of Ra*" ("Phoenix"), guitar solos filched wholesale from Hendrix and costumes

The Cult in 1985: (c/wise from left) Billy Duffy, Les Warner, Jamie Stewart and Ian Astbury

TONY MOTTRAM / GETTY

nicked from The Incredible String Band align neatly with their self-esteeming notion of rebellion.

Billy reckons "young kids pick up *Are You Experienced* or a Doors album and it's mind-blowing because it's so good and they've grown up never being told that this great music happened. To them it's like a new group."

I think we'd better start again… It's not that I have anything against The Cult, it's just that, for an art that purports to thrive on revolution, pop's an industry paranoiacally opposed to change. We used to say the haircuts may differ but the hype's still the same. Now even the haircuts don't change, and I don't think it's being too cynical to suggest that the abolition of the memory of past indulgences isn't exactly a passport to heaven.

"My image of the '60s is romantic," says Ian to no one in particular. "The colours, the clothes, the music and the ambience of the concert – not so much the drug culture that went along with it but the feel of community; a lot of people coming together and something really exciting happening. I'd like to be able to experience that in this day and age, and when I go out and look for it, I'm beginning to experience it. It doesn't exist. It's there if you want it."

He cites Alice In Wonderland, the hardly notorious psychedelic revivalist dungeon in Soho, as the epitome of what he's talking about. A place where you can go and meet like minds, listen to Blue Cheer and ponder the meaning of life… I think we'd better start again…

Even their denial of cliches is cliched, they're buried that far in the rock'n'roll myth.

"Somebody – I think it was Nick Cave – once said something along the lines of, 'What's a cliche? A cliche is the best way of expressing or doing something, and because it's the best, it's become a cliche,'" says Billy. "That, I think, sort of sums the whole thing up. We almost used to apologise for our existence when we started because we didn't feel we were Supertramp. But I think the fact that so many people are either into the bands or into the music, that's the justification."

"We reflect what's going on," Ian insists. "We're typical English kids, and I think vagueness and confusion are definitely a big part of people's lives, the unspoken word, what's it all about? I think that element is forward in what we do because we're quite honest and open about things. We haven't tried to contrive one formula which is very simple and easy to understand, because what we've experienced, what we've been through as individuals, can be very complicated."

This, I presume, is why their songs are incomprehensible?

"We ain't got all the answers. What are the answers to everything? A lot of people put pressure on us, as an alternative group. Remember, at one stage in the Banshees' career, people were looking to them and saying, 'What the fuck are you saying? Where is it in black and white? Are you socialists or are you conservatives? We want some sort of doctrine from you.' Well, I think we've got to a similar stage in our career; people are trying to draw manifestos out of the group and they're not there."

I THINK WE'D BETTER start again…

The Cult are the Muppets Of Goth, not the Wizards Of Oz. Likening themselves to the Banshees is patently ludicrous, because they don't have the credentials, they haven't forged anything of themselves, they've followed in footsteps and bided their time, rebellion reduced to its meekest, warriors drained to their weakest. They're compliant with expectation, they're shadow-rioting, make-believe tripping, they're making a nonsense of mystery. And a lot of people who don't know better, a lot of people who should know better, are being seduced by the noise, taken in by the nuance and ignoring the nonsense for want of anything better burning more brightly.

"Emotions are something you can't cliche," claims Billy. "I think, in the early days, we were chasing our tails around trying to find some obscure angle to communicate something basically very simple. We went along that path with some of our early records, searching for something when the obvious thing was screaming at us. There's no point meandering for six months trying to make a song go to Tibet."

This, presumably, is why, when I ask Billy what's the worst thing The Cult could do, he replies: "Make a concept album about gerbils and use bazookas on it and Japanese nose flutes." It's as if denial of the idiotic excuses the obvious.

I think we'd better start again…

"We haven't talked about deliberate provocation," says Billy. "Like calling the album *Love*. 'Love' is a very powerful word and it can mean many things, not just falling in and out of. To us it's about respect, space and, perhaps, happiness. It's an irreverence to certain things that have been set up, certain barriers that have been put up by the media to say to kids, 'Don't explore that area, we've been down there and it's a waste of time. Basically, all you've got to live for is this, because that's what we like."

> "We're skimming the surface of something quite spiritual"

The Cult subversive? I think we'd better start again… And yet, look around you. Maybe the black leather and beads, the junkie cross and the Jesus locks are some sort of renegade alternative to Wham!. At the very least The Cult say "Discover the world", not "Take a package holiday to Torremolinos". This may be crucial: "It would be so easy for us to go and piss all over Rolls-Royces or do a big turd outside the House Of Commons or sign our record contract outside Buckingham Palace and be sick everywhere or to tell *Top Of The Pops* to fuck off, but doing things like that is bad because you lead people to believe you're something you're not. I think we're responsible to our audience in the sense that we do what we feel is right; we don't try and present something that's not us."

In short, The Cult are honestly clueless. I think we'd better start again….

I think The Cult are hugely liked largely for reasons they claim to abhor, for the big gestures, not the sincere gibberish.

"What's the right reason and what's the wrong reason?" Ian asks enigmatically. "We just do what we believe in, and I think it's basically a good thing, I don't think it's evil."

Ah, that veneer of dimension all over again. For a band who claim so vehemently to be the sum of their experiences, The Cult, live and on record, are the most po-faced, humourless group it's possible to contemplate. They deny the brighter side of existence for the sake of their precious image, an image complete with pseudo-religious trimmings.

"There's no religion in this country," mourns poor Ian. "Christianity, the spiritual side, is a very special part of people's lives, it gives them strength just to live and the only thing for kids to look to is the music.

"Music matters. A 14-year-old kid buys a Duran Duran record, grows up a little bit, becomes a little more wise to what's going on and sees that Duran Duran aren't really saying what they feel, so they go onto something else, maybe the Frankies, something a little bit heavier, something that makes a statement. And then they become bored with that and they end up with us."

A pastiche of knowledge?

"Well, there's a hell of a lot of kids out there who haven't experienced punk rock or a mind-expanding experience; they've just picked up on things for themselves. And I think now's the time that a new generation's coming up, for the first time, that wants something new."

What Ian's pitching for is, of course, progressive rock, the notion of something more deep and meaningful than something else. And equally, of course, that way self-indulgence lies. And worse…

"We're skimming the surface of something quite spiritual…"

See what I mean?

"We don't really want to quantify it. I find it very, very rare to bump into people who are communicating on the same level, because they're so hung up on looking cool or hanging round with the right people. It's so hard to meet people who are tuned into something more than the rational world. We're called hippies because we're into life, right?"

Uh?

"Look, there's certain things we just can't talk about because there's an incredible danger of being misinterpreted. It's really sad and unfortunate, but that's the way it is."

I think we'd better start again… "When punk happened to me, I didn't want to go and make a home for myself and get a wife and kids and that. I wanted to go out and meet people and enjoy being alive and, if anything, I guess that's the band's message: in whatever way you can, live your life, enjoy it while you're here, it's your time."

At last. The end. *Steve Sutherland* •

"I am a witness to my times"

Back with a synth-heavy and political album, the new JONI MITCHELL isn't so unlike the old one. "The disillusionment, the killing of the president, the stain of the Vietnamese war..." she says, recalling her landmark 1970s work. "It was a natural thing for people to look into themselves."

— NME NOVEMBER 30 —

SCENE ONE: JONI Mitchell, New Paintings And Songs, an evening benefit for the Museum Of Contemporary Art at the James Corcoran Gallery, Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles.

(Subtitled: *All the people at this party/ They've got a lot of style/ They've got stamps of many countries/ They've got passport smiles/ Some are friendly/ Some are cutting/ Some are watching it from the wings/ Giving to get something...*"

"People's Parties" from the album *Court And Spark* by Joni Mitchell, 1973.)

A low building in a parade of liquor stores, restaurants and other sub-glamorous service industry ephemera. Outside, faces watch figures emerging from cabs and limousines. Inside, faces are watching faces...

Mitchell's husband Larry Klein, handsome eyes shining, is talking with a beaming Pat Metheny, who suddenly throws his head back and laughs delightedly. A posse of the curious, gathered close by in the as-yet-uncrowded room, pause mid-conversation and smile, anxious to share in the joke. A tall young man with a video camera balanced on his shoulder moves in towards the room's dominant canvas, a vast and semi-figurative work titled *Dog Eat Dog*, like Mitchell's new LP. He is recording the event for Japanese TV...

Shelley Duvall is looking earnestly at a work called *The Marriage Of Church And State*, which features a soiled »

REX FEATURES

"The western world has all the symptoms of downfall": Joni Mitchell backstage at the first Farm Aid concert, September 1985

crucifix hammered onto an American flag. Within the Stars And Stripes there stands a small army of toy-shop tin generals tacked on by hand. A woman squeezes past, wine glass aloft. "My God, that's Barbi Benton. She looks no older," says a whisper in her wake . . . a flurry of excitement in the entrance hall and Mitchell herself is here. The presence is palpable, long before her trademark black beret can be glimpsed amid the clamour, because waves of people radiate from her wherever she moves.

Closest to her are the friends with whom she exchanges kisses and conversation mindful of the audience. Next there are the friends of those friends listening in. And by them, a broader band of spectators watch the listeners listening. Further back linger the shy, the single, the resolutely un-star-struck. Fame, it seems acts like a pebble dropped into a pond.

"…Life's been pretty good to you, hasn't it?" a beautiful, dark-haired girl with wide-open eyes is asking Jack Nicholson as he lounges in a doorway granting audiences to a procession of young callers. "Yeah," replies Jack, giving that slow, wicked smile and tilting his shades forward a little. "Life's been fucking great…"

Wayne Shorter's saxophone trails behind the general conversation and rises to the ceiling – like cigarette smoke in the smaller of the gallery's two main rooms. It is *Dog Eat Dog* being played on continuous loop through loudspeakers. Mitchell is now circulating among her guests. Having been introduced to Sheena Easton, she is craning forward in conversation. "You're from a small town too, aren't you?" those passing can hear her ask.

Outside in the warm, dark-blue night, departing guests are being presented with copies of the new album. One group pauses on the sidewalk discussing the paintings inside. "I expected them to be more figurative somehow, like her record covers," says one man. Asked about this, her first ever collected exhibition of art work, Mitchell will say later, "At their most trivial you could think of them [her paintings] as party decorations for the release of the new album. At their most trivial, they are at least that good."

SCENE TWO: AFTERNOON tea at the offices of Peter Asher Management, North Doheny Drive, Los Angeles. Joni Mitchell turns aside from the birthday celebrations of her manager's secretary, wipes crumbs from her fingers, and dissects her art, her music and her increasingly troubled view of America and the wider world.

(Subtitled: "*Fiction of obedience / Fiction of rebellion / Fiction of the goody-goody and the hellion / Fiction of destroyers / Fiction of preservers / Fiction of peacemakers and shit disturbers…*"

"Fiction", from the album *Dog Eat Dog* by Joni Mitchell, 1985.)

The flaxen-haired figure sitting behind a large glass desk in a small side office looks tired. Joni Mitchell at 41 is an intriguing mixture of sage and schoolgirl. Clothes are elegant, expensively understated, heavy silk sleeves carelessly rolled up, emerald suede shoes slipped on and off unconsciously while considering a response. The look is anything but Hollywood, just minutes the down the boulevard, and the effect as unselfconscious as can be. But her beauty and candour are as disarming as her music.

This is the woman, born in Fort Macleod, Alberta, and raised in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, who began singing while at art school in Calgary; who married and divorced the folk singer Chuck Mitchell in the mid-'60s; whose songs "The Circle Game" and "Both Sides Now" were recorded by other artists (Tom Rush and Judy Collins respectively) before she released her first solo album; whose song "Woodstock", from her third album *Ladies of The Canyon*, became the anthem for a generation; who released the ultimate bedsitter-land soundtrack with 1971's *Blue*, expanded its folk-pop concerns in the following year's *For The Roses*, then sold self-pity down the Swanee in the search for jazz.

This is the artist whose 1974 release *Court And Spark* stands today as a milestone of romantic introspection, leading into a double, *Miles of Aisles*, reworking her existing songbook in a jazz-aware framework that would

GETTY

"We were a kind of freaky generation; very self-centred as a rule, in a good way and a bad way": Mitchell in 1985

itself lead to 1976's historic *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns*. An impressionistic collection of jazz-pop vignettes, it contrasted the sterile life of her suburban sisters with the threatening but fertile jungle world lying beyond the well-manicured lawns and airy interiors of Beverly Hills and Bel-Air…

This in turn would be developed into the paired-down, minimal jazz accompaniments of *Hejira*, an album that paired Mitchell's guitar with the brooding electric bass work of Weather Report player Jaco Pastorius on songs about flight, fame, fear and escape.

These achievements alone would assure Joni Mitchell of her place in some cobwebbed hall of all-time fame. But add a career that continued to flourish (artistically if not commercially) through a still more fully blooded romance with jazz on studio double-album *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* and the collaboration with the then-dying composer and bassist Charles Mingus on 1979's *Mingus*, and it becomes more difficult to fathom Joni Mitchell's place in the scheme of things.

Has she released an electro album using synthesized voices to disguise the vocal shortcomings of being middle-aged? Has she published a racy autobiography detailing her lovelife with California's mellowest but most macho men? Has she even turned a well-timed back on liberalism and come out in support of nuking, nationalism and New Cold War Diplomacy? None of these things…? What? She's even turned in a more than half-way decent new album that brings her razor-edged lyricism into the '80s world of Fairlights and pre-Holocaust paranoia? This is not what becomes a legend most, these days at least. Joni Mitchell has some answering to do…

> "The dream, everything that America stood for, was broken"

THE LEGEND IS laughing. "You know, I'm just one of those Spock babies. We do everything a little late…" In this case the joke could be on any one of the many Joni Mitchell fans who rely on their heroine to articulate those unique-yet-universal stirrings of the heart – the circumstantial minutiae of the love affair. Her own emotional turmoil has fuelled both her art and the animosity of critics. She has been called the High Priestess Of Confessional Songwriting in some columns. *Rolling Stone*, in one article featuring a family tree of her liaisons, called her "Old Lady of The Year".

Every silver lining has its cloud. "It took a long time for me to remarry," says Mitchell, referring to 1983's ceremony with bassist Klein, 28. "It took me a long time to find the stability of a partner again. But what am I going to do now? Torture myself? Sit there and reminisce about the past? It would be bad for me, bad for my marriage. So with that taken care of, you begin to look around you. It's a natural sociological phenomenon, you know."

She is explaining the logic behind the newfound politicism of her music. *Dog Eat Dog* has the odd strand of romanticism in its lyrical fabric, but also contains attacks on consumerism, right-wing evangelism, media hype, international aid policy and good old-fashioned greed. It's a list of targets that might be considered hip if addressed less articulately by someone half her age.

As it is, Joni Mitchell has made one of the most political albums to come out of America this year. The title track refers to a nation of "*snakebite evangelists and marketeers – a culture in decline*".

"*Land of snap decisions / Land of short attention spans / Nothing is savoured long enough / To really understand…*"

"Although I see it in America because I'm here, it's more of a global point of view," she says, gesturing with a cigarette. "We are so interrelated with the news being the way it is… world incidents broadcast into your living room… the western world has all the symptoms of downfall if you study it and compare it with all the other civilisations that have gone under. There are the youth cult obsessions, a greater openness regarding homosexuality, the decadent theatre reflecting the repressed savageness of a culture. Look at German theatre before Hitler. It's very similar to MTV with all its black studs, that one pocket that rock went through a couple of years ago that was dominantly savage, apocalyptic… the enactment of surviving a holocaust…savage scavengers. Even though there's a certain theatricalness, there's also a truth to it." This awareness, coupled with the stability of marriage, led her away from what others would call her confessional muse.

"I never thought of myself so much as a confessional songwriter," she says, "but in order that my work should have vitality, I felt I should write in my own blood. The closer it was to my direct experience, the less it was going to be hearsay, the more poignancy it should have. My job as I see it is to be a witness. I am a witness to my times. The world had become so mysterious from the vantage point of the '70s. The disillusionment, the killing of the president, the stain of the Vietnamese war. It was a natural thing for people to look into themselves.

"That period was one of soul searching. The dream, everything that America stood for, was broken, and the people break a little with the dream. Where do you have left to go but in?"

It was, she concedes, a very particular moment in time, experienced by those coming of age in the '60s.

"We really broke from our elders. There was a clear cut. A line was drawn. This generation kind of resembles my parents' generation, like a throwback, which often happens. Their aim is to get a job and hold it because they came up in a depression, although not one as severe as that of the '30s. But they came up under the same pressures. We came up in the greatest pocket of affluence post-Second World War, though. The country was rich, the economy was in good shape, and we were raised on certain philosophies. Like, spare the rod. Yes, do spoil the child. So we never really reached adulthood in a certain way. We were a kind of freaky generation; very self-centred as a rule, in a good way and a bad way…"

Liberated from the need to introspect, Mitchell found inspiration in full measure by looking around at the confused kingdom her babyboomer peers had inherited. To her, one of the most disturbing phenomena was the eerie interplay between religion and politics which began as a reaction to the soft-pedal Carter years and which has found full expression during Ronald Reagan's presidency. Her song "Tax Free", from the new album, analyses the implications, employing actor Rod Steiger's melodramatic oracular talents to simulate one of the hawkish TV preachers.

"*Lord, there's danger in this land / You get witch-hunts and wars / When church and state hold hands…*" she sings, as Steiger counters, "*I think we should turn the United States Marines loose on that little island south of Florida and stop that problem… I am preachin' love… I am…*"

"Tax Free" starts from the premise that the new right-wing religious are playing the same stadiums as the rock bands they so despise, and can »

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

SCENE ONE: 'JONI MITCHELL, New Paintings New Songs', an evening benefit for The Museum Of Contemporary Art at the

…"Life's been pretty good to you, hasn't it?", a beautiful, dark-haired girl with wide-open eyes is asking Jack Nicholson as he lounges in a doorway granting audiences to a procession of

anything but Hollywood, just minutes down the boulevard, and the effect as unselfconscious as can be. But her beauty and candour are as disarming as her music.

This is the woman, born in Fort MacLeod,

outdraw even Springsteen. It then shows how the "*immaculately tax free*" preachers combine with the President to inculcate the idea that any opposition to church or state is Communist-induced, and that perhaps the right of free speech should be taken away from its instigators.

"So now it starts to get really scary," says Mitchell, leaning forward and jabbing the air with her cigarette. "You think, we're only a hairline and a few laws from incredible censorship. They're already trying to censor rock'n'roll. One of the reasons this album is so outspoken in the context of my work is that I think it's a case of use it or lose it. If I don't start speaking out, taking a chance and addressing things that are important to me in this way, we might not have this outlet very long."

HAVING TAKEN PART in the recent Farm Aid benefit and joined in the recording of "Tears Are Not Enough", the Canadian equivalent to "Do They Know It's Christmas?", did she detect a reactive movement back to more Woodstock-style values among the young?

"Woodstock was Woodstock… it had its own identity. There'll never be another Woodstock" she says. "Every time there's been one of those large gatherings of people, any one of them, they've been entirely different. Collectively, each of those crowds had its own personality. To me, Woodstock was a very high event. It was the height of the hippy movement. Afterwards it began to recede.

"Live Aid didn't have the same things up against it as Woodstock did. It was much more commercialised. They were flashing up the band's latest album after every song. I don't think people were weeping in the wings. I don't think there was the same poignancy surrounding the event."

Dog Eat Dog contains the song "Ethiopia", her own comment on the political inertia and short-sightedness that contributes to the famine and threatens its repetition elsewhere. It will also provide royalties for charitable causes, but is far removed lyrically from the self-involved smugness of, for example, "We Are The World". It fuses the ecological concerns of past songs like "Big Yellow Taxi" and "The Hissing Of Summer Lawns" with the bleak, minimal sound of *Hejira* and provides a despairing, angry whole. Mitchell admits that, yes, she worried that she might be accused of picking up on a chic subject and that, yes, there was opposition in some quarters to its inclusion on the album.

"It's too good a song to even think about what people might think of it on the downside. I'm used to people thinking of my work on the downside. I've had plenty of it." Mitchell's husky voice has a hard edge to it now. "The song was too good to kill. I thought, 'It's not a pretty subject. It will be too sad for some people. They won't like it, won't want to look at it.' But what would you do? If you'd written that song, abort it? Wouldn't you put it on record?"

"After I'd done the Canadian Band Aid, I felt that all the songs that had been written, while they were good for generating the spirit to gather money and to focus people on a cause – in that they were perfect – they were more about us, we the performers and we the contributors of money, than they were about the people of Africa themselves. So once I had that idea I did the portrait more of the Ethiopians themselves in the context of our own world hunger.

"To me it's not like they're over there and they have a drought; they mismanaged their soil, it's now sick and their government doesn't really care about them. That could happen anywhere in the world at any time, closer to home. We can cause the same problems with our pesticides going into in the ground… You're going to get me into my apocalyptic vision now… terrible doings are being done in the name of commerce. The rain forests are coming down around the globe. We're going to have deserts springing up all over the place. It's not just going to be in Ethiopia."

The song's impression is made all the more powerful by the simplicity of its musical form in contrast to the computer-age pop she has adapted elsewhere. The sound is expensive – it is Mitchell's most costly album to date – and, uniquely for her post-folkie work, production credits are given to outside agents. Nile Rodgers and Thomas Dolby both volunteered, but she was wary of turning her music over to someone so completely.

"I found it difficult, because I've always been kind of a benign dictator on my dates," she says of the production-by-committee (Mitchell and Klein, engineer Mike Shipley and, on some of the tracks, Dolby as well) that resulted. "There's never been a producer. There never was a credit given, and I leaned heavily on artistic contributions from my players.

"A producer is kind of guy who has the last word. Often he's a formula man. He's trying to make something commercial, and that can be a watering down. I don't think of producers generally speaking – and there are exceptions – as people who play long shots."

Mitchell says that she and her husband had been attracted by the best of recent music using Fairlights and drum machines, and wanted to assimilate that sound into her own work. But Shipley was invited onto the sessions to handle the more complex functions of the equipment that they had not yet learned to perform, and then the need for a fourth person – Dolby – to speed up programming was recognised. There have been rumours that it was not an altogether harmonious relationship.

"I was reluctant when Thomas was suggested, because he had asked to produce the record," she admits. "Would he consider coming in as a programmer and a player? So we met with him and said, 'Now we know you're used to being a frontliner and this is kind of a foot-soldier position…', and he said, 'I would love to do it. I am sick of people always looking to me for the answer.'

"And when he said that, I thought of the play *A Chorus Line*. I thought, 'I know his intentions are the best and that at this moment he believes he can do that, but he's still a lead player and can he go back into the chorus line. He's going to have to subordinate his ideas.

"So on that level we did have some problems, because he'd get excited with some idea and I couldn't get him off the keyboards. Then I'd feel bad. I'd think, 'Oh God, I understand. He's on a creative roll. But he can't, because if he does that he'll decorate me right off my own project.'

"He may be able to do it faster. He may even be able to do it better, but the fact is it won't really be my music."

> "We're only a hairline and a few laws from incredible censorship"

It would be hard not to see the irony in the fact that Mitchell has just released her most rock-aware album in more than a decade at a time when the American mega-sales are going to artists testing their toes in jazz. Complete immersion in the form led to her being pilloried by many critics on her home continent, and being largely ignored by record buyers. Is she bitter?

"I felt bitter at the time. I had bitter moments. I had to fight it. But I did not become an embittered person, so I won some of the battles. I took a lot of hard knocks. Mean knocks, not smart knocks. People weren't thinking… they were just afraid of it.

"It was just different at the time… and now this is a good time for it. I'm glad it came about this way, because it gives me optimism. I like to make that kind of music, and I like the idea of it having a broad public communication.

"There is a tendency on some projects for something to be considered jazz because jazz is new chic. But it's not good jazz. It's beginner's. But the players that Sting is working with, for instance – those are real virtuosi."

"I like the idea that good musicians can have a broad public communication. And you've got to start somewhere. Even if I'm thinking, 'God, you think this is hip but you haven't even digested the history of jazz enough to know that, like, this giant existed and he did that…'

September 22, 1985: Mitchell performing at Farm Aid in the Memorial Stadium, Champaign, Illinois

"It may be very beginnerish, but it's still where to begin to educate the public. Maybe if they can like that, then they can like something else too and gradually acquire a taste for this magnificent pocket of music that has always been designated as something for, kind of, '50s cellars in Europe."

As for herself, there are no plans to explore the area further now that the rest of the industry is catching up: "All people have to do is go back and play the old records," she says. "I already did that."

Old wounds are still discernible, though. *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns*, widely considered to be her landmark album of the '70s, was voted "Worst Album of The Year" by the staff of *Rolling Stone* on its release in 1976. She got a telegram from Paul and Linda McCartney that year saying, 'We really liked it.' It was the only good review that it got, and then it was almost a sympathy telegram.

"It was destroyed on so many levels, and that really hurt. There's no way, just on a level of craftsmanship, that you could say it was the worst record made that year. If they'd just said they hated it, you could take it, because it would be a personal opinion. But to say it's the worst…

"Stay as you are and bore us, or change and betray us. That's your choice." Mitchell smiles and shrugs, pausing to light another cigarette.

ASKED TO CONSIDER her position in relation to the women's movement, she draws herself up behind the desk with shoulders hunched and hands clasped, like a pupil concentrating in class. On one level, she has done more than any other female songwriter to express the sexual and emotional landscape of the past two decades. On another, she has always seemed apart from other women, either isolated in her art or distanced from them by her romantic relationships. She admits she has never seen herself as a feminist, finding the structures of the movement too limiting and divisive.

"I had a good relationship with my father," she says carefully. "He taught me a lot of things that, had he had a son, he would have taught a boy. How to make bows and arrows and so on. I enjoy men's company, and I grew up enjoying it. My best friendships I've made in my life, generally speaking, were with men. It's not that I don't like women. I've made good friendships with women too, but I'm so driven as women go that I can relate more to driven men. A lot of women would like to paint, for example, but they have 101 things that keep them from doing it. I can have friendships with these women, but sometimes I remind them of their inability to get going, which leaves a hole or a potential hole in the relationship.

"Feminism was too divisive. It was us against them… but it did something to open things up. I hate the word but I like the idea of a person, that a man and a woman can sit and for one moment all of these sexual considerations are bypassed and you have an open dialogue from person to person. I have basically tried to live my life as a person in that way."

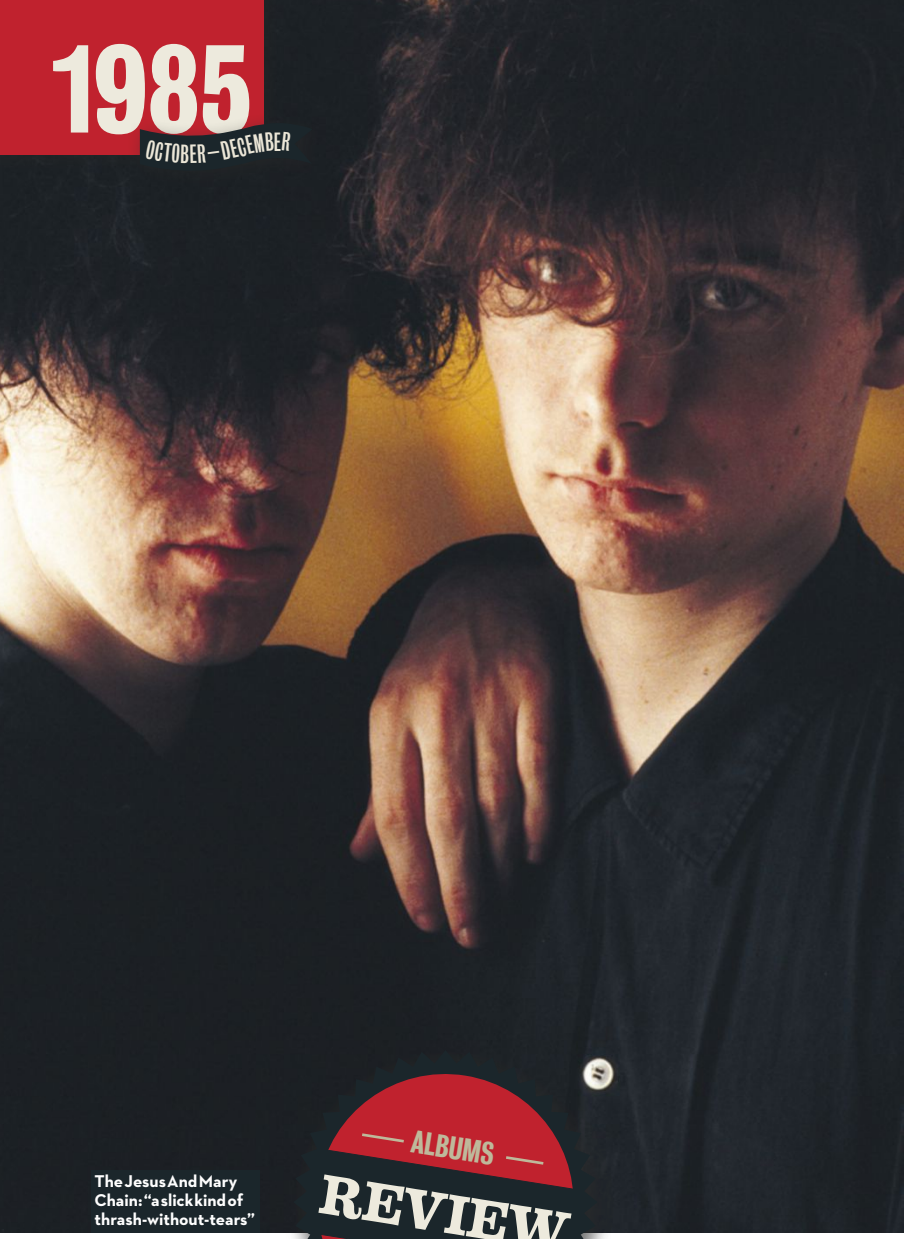
Suddenly she lightens, remembering an article she has read recently about one of the new right-wing women's organisations. It is hard for her to keep from laughing while relating the story.

"I forget the name of the particular group, but it was Christian women linked to getting the devil's language out of rock'n'roll," she says. "They like being housewives. They're anti-feminist, and they were in training to go out and visit the media, because some of them had appeared on television and had felt awkward. So the training programme consisted of a woman standing up and saying, (*Mitchell adopts a prissy Miss Manners delivery*) 'Now remember, girls, on TV your knees are your best friends. Keep them together…', and then, 'Take out your pocket mirrors, girls. I want you to notice that if, when you're speaking, you raise your eyebrows up and down, your voice takes on a more melodious quality.'"

Mitchell is laughing with delight now as she winds up the anecdote: "The last thing the article said was that the women prayed, they sang songs, and then they looked at an aborted foetus, and I thought, 'God, this is a new movement? It's just as sick and limited as the old one. It's the pendulum sprung back too far against a reaction which was itself already too extreme. When is the pendulum going to get to the middle?'"

She talks a little about the art show, her recent move into abstract painting – "I've just broken into a movement that happened in the '50s. I'm still an art student" – and other plans for coming to Europe with her band next year. Outside the room her husband lounges in a chair chatting with office staff. He grins when he sees her. With the heart soothed, Joni Mitchell has found fresh sources to energise her music. *Alan Jackson* •

PAUL NATKIN



The Jesus And Mary Chain: "a slick kind of thrash-without-tears"

ALBUMS REVIEW 1985

ALBUMS

The Jesus & Mary Chain Psychocandy WARNERS

The neighbours are having their flat done up, as it happens. Hammering, banging and crashing all day. I stuck the Mary Chain's album on and it sounded exactly like they were coming through the wall with a Black & Decker. Bloody frightening.

Psychocandy is a strangely tame wee beastie, quite endearing in a funny sort of way. It's rooted so specifically in a New York situated exactly halfway between the Velvet Underground and the Ramones that everybody and their dog is going to be heartily sick of hearing the same comparisons in a very short space of time. Still, this is what you get for serving up your roots in so thin a disguise.

The Chains have perfected a slick kind of thrash-without-tears which extends to a kind of turbined-up powerpop in places ("The Hardest Walk", for instance) or in others becomes a swift, uplifting rush (check "My Little Underground").

Vocals throughout are firmly rooted in the Eldritch school of gloom, resonating as if from across some misty loch or perhaps from inside a storm drain a mile or two away. This anaesthetises the Reids and co from anything like meaning or intent, while letting you, the listener, receive this post-dated package in a sort of void of abstraction, coloured more by your reaction to the myths than to the item itself.

The best bits are where they let you see the little soft spots in their hard northern hearts. "You Trip Me Up" could easily have started out as an attempt to cover The Archies' farrago of tack "Sugar Sugar", and beneath its scaly covering of whining guitars and hyperventilating percussion it's a chartbuster trying to get out. "Cut Dead", on the other hand, is merely empirical proof that all that name-dropping of the Velvets' third album is true. Here, the osmosis is so entire that you wonder if in fact they've dug up some obscure Lou Reed song from a long-lost bootleg.

What else can I tell you? You should hear "Just Like Honey" and you've probably heard "Never Understand". The horrible screaming of "In A Hole" really is just like having a tooth drilled, and "Taste Of Cindy" grinds onward like a four-wheel-drive Daihatsu going down Ben Nevis.

Live with it for a bit and you'll either declare it a classic or sling it out with the bathwater. I haven't decided yet. Can't say it sounds much like pop's new clothes, but then who'd want it to?

Adam Sweeting, MM Nov 23

Robert Wyatt Old Rottenhat ROUGH TRADE

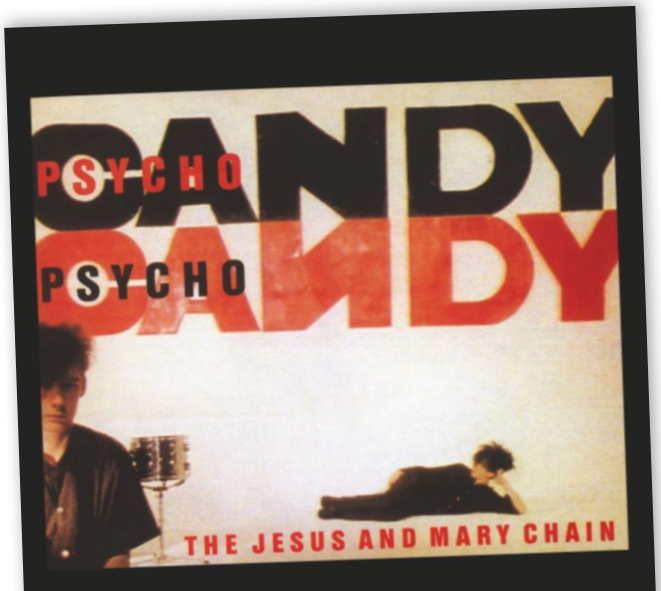
Can politics and music mix? Are songs about matters commonly deemed to belong in the political sphere not really songs at all, but rather singing pamphlets on a par with singing telegrams? Should political songs necessarily be anthemic and sloganising: is their purpose to stress goals, identify the enemy, raise the spirits and unite common causes in a single voice?

What is music for?

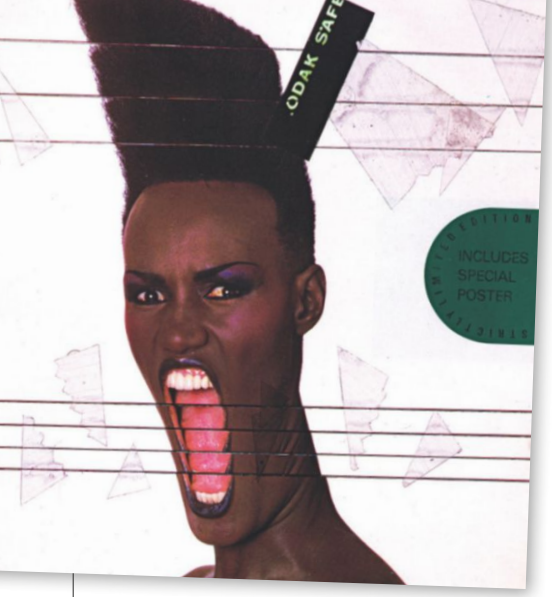
Old Rottenhat raises all these questions; but first impressions first. How does it sound? "Musically, I should say it's more of a slinking record than a dance record," ventures Robert in his customarily wry press release. He's right. *Old Rottenhat* neither quickens the pulse nor punches the shadows; rather, it fills the air with the sound of quietly philosophical Englishness, a point of view, a tone of voice, a singular mood.

Robert Wyatt's quirky individualism is the strength of his music and argument. A Wyatt record is like an old friend; it neither hectors, lectures nor harangues as if the listener were a public meeting. His plaintively low-key voice and the uncluttered, hymnal contemplativeness of his music demand you listen hard; its quiet self-effacement is not only impossible to ignore, but invests with personal relevance and resonance tunes hitherto abandoned to memory's stockpile of frozen standards. I'm thinking of his 1974 version of The Monkees' "I'm A Believer" and his solo rendition of "The Red Flag" from the 1982 collection *Nothing Can Stop Us*; sung by Robert Wyatt, they find a melancholy dimension that rings touching, refreshing and true.

Old Rottenhat – as unheroic an LP title as there's ever been – is dedicated to Michael Bettaney, "just one of England's (sic) many political prisoners". Since *Old Rottenhat* is Robert Wyatt's first LP of self-penned songs since 1975's *Ruth Is Stranger Than Richard*, I should imagine he thought long and hard about this choice. Bettaney's trial for trying to pass official secrets to Russia indicated a most hapless bungler, inspired more by embittered outsiderhood than idealism. Robert Wyatt makes no distinction between this dubious character and a more noble



MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD / GETTY



political prisoner. Whichever, Bettaney shouldn't be in jail, and Wyatt's judgement here is humane, not ideological – a telling gesture.

But of what does he sing? The majority of songs here are plainly "political". He regrets the divisiveness and hypocrisy of the Alliance parties ("Alliance"); sighs at the modish view that workerism has been undermined by consumerisation ("The Age Of Self"); confronts white America with the wilfully forgotten history lesson of the Red Indian extermination ("United States Of Amnesia"); derides British self-glorification ("The British Road"); reminds that there is such a place as East Timor, and all is not well there ("East Timor"); implicates our "free press" in the erosion of our freedom of thought ("Mass Medium")...

These are familiar topics of hand-wringing conversation amongst *Guardian* readers such as myself; but does conscience only prod if pushed by novelty? Should concern diminish with loss of newsworthiness? And would we just stand there and be buttonholed, however right-on the message, if the messenger was a bore?

Luckily, not a note strikes false nor word rings hollow. With quiet, mournful endurance, Robert Wyatt applies steady musical pressure – a sort of analogue to the theory where real history is not the surface activity of the waves, but rather the great invisible oceanic movements beneath. Words may lose their original meaning over time, but music conveys a profounder spirit. That is what music is for.

By the way, a great record.

Mat Snow, NME Nov 30

Grace Jones
Slave To The Rhythm ZTT

The scene: an unwashed and impolitely dazed Paul Morley stumbles into the ZTT offices one day. "But Trevor, the people are hungry for imagination, stimulation, novelty!"

"All power to the bank balance," interjects a singularly inappropriate Jill Sinclair.

"Shut up, the pair of you," snaps a particularly repetitive Trevor Horn. "I'm just putting the finishing touches to my latest sound gattucks."

"You mean gateaux," corrects a shamefaced Morley.

"I know what I damn well mean, now I wonder if we could just squeeze a Steve Howe guitar solo in here. And quit groaning like that, you're putting me off."

So here we have the ultimate ZTT product – Grace Jones, still sounding like a woman and looking like a man on a record that looks like an album but sounds like a single. By which I mean that it's over all too quickly (by no means). No, I mean it contains a single song, "Slave To The Rhythm", remixed, rejigged, rehashed (and now reviewed and rejected).

Of course, this being ZTT, this isn't all you get for your money, oh no. There's snatches of interviews between Grace and Paul Cook of Capital Radio and Grace and Paul Morley, extracts from Jean-Paul Goude's autobiography and snatches of Ian Penman's sleeve notes (which is just as well because you can't read them on the sleeve).

As a conceptual joke it has its moments, "Slave To The Rhythm" being the most finely ironic dance record of the last few years. But you'd have to set me in manacles before you'd force me to listen to Horn's by now generically tedious pomp-funk (over)workouts. Imagination is not the extension but the concentration of an idea. Here the idea is layered thin but the production is slapped on in great slaps of marzipan and cream.

Jill Sinclair: "Give them this, tell them it's gattucks and charge them five quid."

This consumer: "Five quid for gattucks – bolleaux." *Don Watson, NME Nov 2*

10,000 Maniacs: made to sound like Steeleye Span

SINGLES REVIEW 1985

SINGLES

The Pet Shop Boys West End Girls PARLOPHONE

Loved this the first time it was released and I love it still, which is interesting because suave sophistication normally leaves me cold. The Pet Shop Boys don't push it, though; it's smooth, sinuous and deviously insidious. Who gives a tinker's cuss for their reputation, I'm giving this one pop single of the week. *MM Nov 9*

Pulp Little Girl FIRE

A slow-motion nursery rhyme broodiness that swirls into alarming hiccupping noises like you're playing the record at the wrong speed – a clumsy explanation but the execution is sublime. The song is all about girls realising that their destinies don't have to be tied to a man's. "*Hey little girl, there's a hole in your heart and one between your legs as well/ You never have to wonder about which one he's going to fill in spite of what he says.*" The singer sounds slightly like Lloyd Cole only harder, and the song pursues an enigmatic simplicity that further accentuates its lyric. Excellent. *MM Nov 9*

New Order Sub-Culture FACTORY

Goal! New Order (the concept) has somehow remained intact: the dancefloor dream with the guts of a "rock group". New Order (the evidence) doesn't always measure up, trickling out through cold corridors of machinery. "Confusion" alright. "Sub-Culture" is one of their precious moments, a delicious 12 inches of luminous purpose. A crossfire of voices and machines is deftly edited, switched, dubbed, faded and Lord knows what else. There's also evidence that a New Order with a decent vocalist could rule the world, as the soulful female singers deployed here (but absent from the album version) add some welcome red corpuscles to the unit's frequently indifferent mumblings. I've always found their neutral attitude towards vocals odd when they take so much care over everything else. Have they seen the light? Brilliant anyway. *MM Nov 16*

Gil Scott-Heron Winter In America/Johannesburg ARISTA

Gil is the most critically respected man ever, but clearly has little chance of getting on Mike Read's show. "Winter In America" is a depressing dirge about the hollowness of American democracy, etc, and commits ritual suicide by having a flute solo in the middle. "Johannesburg" was a hit 10 years ago, bubbles along over a light soul/funk backing, and Gil's vocal is knowing and agile. On the 10-inch you get two tracks from the back catalogue – "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" and "B Movie", both poems spoken to music. Much meatier than "The Wind Of Change". *MM Nov 16*

10,000 Maniacs Just As The Tide Was Flowing MYTH AMERICA

It's getting difficult to know what to say about American groups these days. 10,000 Maniacs don't fit the existing pigeonholes (ie, no Neil Young guitar growl and definitely no Doors), and here, producer Joe Boyd has made them sound like Steeleye Span, which was almost inevitable given Natalie Merchant's voice and Boyd's track record. This is a "trad arr" job, and frankly is a much better choon than a lot of the group's own. Could still use more ballast and more clarity. Pleasant. Unspectacular. Miss. *MM Nov 16*

ANDREW CATLIN

"We're not a pop group"

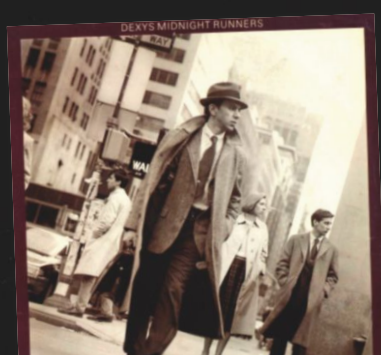
Kevin Rowland's vision for DEXYS MIDNIGHT RUNNERS remains uncompromising – but now he seems to be leaving people behind. Has it all backfired? "Dexys are not in competition with Wham!," he says. "I am convinced that there are people who still want to hear good music."

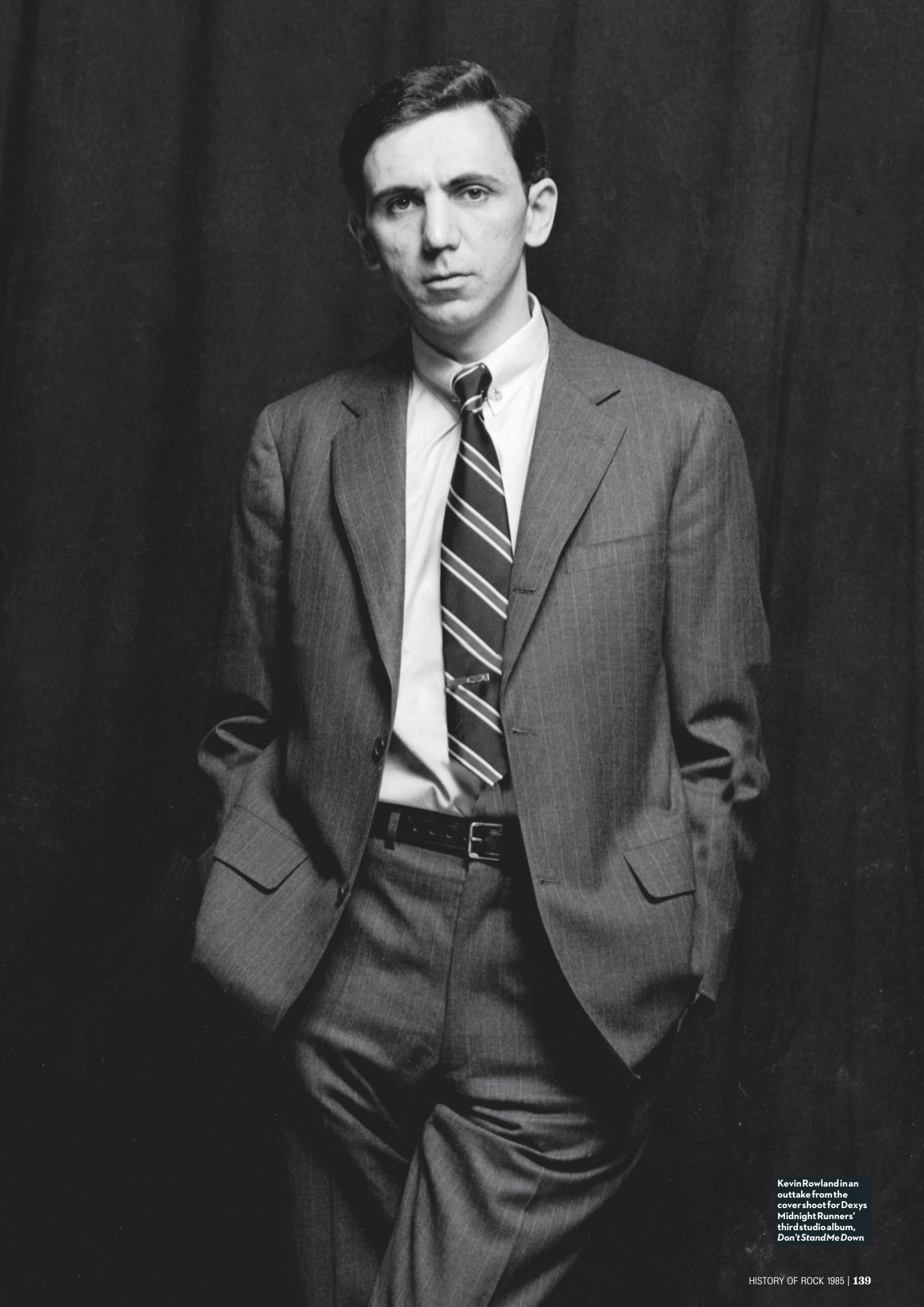
— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 2 —

LET'S GET THIS straight from the start. Kevin Rowland invited me down to East London 10 days ago so that he might eventually sell a few more records. So what's new? Quite often the suspicious reporter will get a hint that this is indeed the case and that all that other clever talk about an extra insight into the latest magnum opus and the state of the world beyond is just so much dung. But this time it was definitely true. And I know because he said so.

Kevin Rowland also talked a bit about Ireland (though not as much as I had hoped for), a lot about CND (more than I would have anticipated), and there was the unexpected bonus of hearing him and Billy Adams have a spontaneous chant that could have come straight off the word games on the album.

That album, *Don't Stand Me Down*, is, of course, one of the great mystery plays of the year, a nightmare labour of love against all the odds which has perplexed and inspired in roughly equal parts and which, if not quite up to the impossibly high standards of *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels* or the mish-mash commercial appeal of *Too-Rye-Ay*, is still head and shoulders above most of this year's offerings to date. It has, however, stiffed out in quite remarkable style and took a spectacular »





Kevin Rowland in an outtake from the cover shoot for Dexys Midnight Runners' third studio album, *Don't Stand Me Down*

fall from the nation's charts in the week we eventually met up. Hence the interview. Hence the need to sell more records.

I was nervous as hell. After all, it's not every day you get to meet somebody you used to send fan mail to, somebody who influenced the way you talked, the way you fought and the way you were at a time when nothing else seemed to matter. He seemed relaxed enough, snatching a couple of hours in-between rehearsals for the forthcoming British tour on which, if this brief glimpse is anything to go by, the greatest comeback since Richard Nixon will take place before your very eyes. But that's for me to know and you to find out when the time comes.

Today, we just had a bit of a barney. Kevin likes that sort of thing and it probably helps him sell a lot more records. It would be the easiest thing in the world to do a little bit of creative editing and turn it all into a first-rate hatchet job, as he would call it, but there's not really much point in that, because it's just what Kevin expects and it would therefore be boring and as ugly as sin.

It started off with a cup of tea, and a provisional plan to start now and work back rapidly went from bad to worse, ending up with an attempt to clear the air by talking about Catholicism and class. So here it is, or at least the bits we both remember. The words have not been changed, although they might have read a lot better that way.

Are you surprised that the album has not been a great commercial success? Or disappointed?

"I'm not incredibly surprised. Disappointed? No. I have every confidence in the LP. I think it will eventually be successful and I think it is very early days yet. I really do."

Was it a mistake not to release a single?

"Definitely, although it depends on what you mean by a mistake. But yeah, I'm sure that if we had released this single before the LP, then the album would have been a great success. I knew it wouldn't be easy this way and we are now going to release a single after all. It's called "An Extract From 'What's She Like?'".

That must have meant some cutting (the original clocks in at around 11 minutes).

"No, we're not cutting anything. We're taking the first section plus a little bit either side of it and then making a four-minute version for DJs so they can play it on the radio. There are no actual edits or bits joined up."

So you've changed your mind?

"Yeah."

And that is purely because of the commercial failure of the album?

"I had always planned to release a single about three months after the album. It's now two months, so it's a bit sooner than I wanted, but the main reason I didn't want one originally was because I wanted the album to be seen as just that, an album, and it's OK because it has been taken as that. The basic problem is that not enough people know that it's actually out or have heard it enough times to be familiar enough with it and go out and buy it."

Maybe that's not helped by your reluctance to do interviews.

"I think it's more to do with the fact that we didn't release a single. That's what sells albums,

A complete scenario

MM SEPT 7 Kevin Rowland makes "album of the year".

ALBUMS REVIEW 1985

Dexys Midnight Runners
Don't Stand Me Down EMI

Compromise, as Kevin Rowland so sharply observes on the opening verse of this remarkable album, is the devil talking.

An artist, then, of extremes. A man who makes an art form out of overkill. A man of supreme arrogance. A man of... paranoia? Such are the conflicts, the contradictions, the confusion of the tortured pop star. But compromise? Never.

And so. Gone are the dungarees, the gypsy scarves, the rebel posture, the platoon of fiddles and the search for the young soul Ireland of *Too-Rye-Ay*. Instead we have button-down shirts, three-piece suits, Stock Exchange haircuts and hearts firmly pinned to sleeves. Yet these true confessions are laced with bizarre informal conversations, occasional bouts of restraint(!) and even – gasp – *humour*. This, surely, is a first.

We *also* have... quite the most challenging, absorbing, moving, uplifting and ultimately triumphant album of the year.

Being Kevin Rowland, of course, it's not just an album. It's a mood, an attitude, a complete scenario that extends well beyond image, and unlike *Too-Rye-Ay*, the image appears to bear little relevance to the music. What the record does have is light and shade and depth and warmth and humanity. And where before Dexys have wasted a lot of breath talking about passion, here they simply provide it... Eat your hearts out Prefab Sprout. Closing track "The Waltz" – and it is just that – is beautiful and poignant, a song born of a disillusioned but resilient spirit... "*I've been to the promised land, I've been there/I've also been down to the bottom and looked up from despair*".

The album ends with Rowland howling "*Here's a protest, here's a protest*" amid the bittersweetness; and sardonic references to British "greatness" suggest the theme of "The Waltz" may be obliquely political. Ah, word games, they always were his forte.

Oddly enough, some of the central themes of *Too-Rye-Ay* are explored more fully – particularly in relation to nostalgia and childhood. One short track, "Reminisce Part Two", involves Rowland simply talking about a teenage romance in 1969 over an attractive piano/mandolin backing. "*We decided to adopt a song that was current – she wanted it to be 'I'll Stay Forever My Love' by Jimmy Ruffin, I wanted it to be 'Lola' by The Kinks.*"

Most people entrust this sort of information only to Mike Read and his "First Love" spot – Rowland puts it on a bloody record! With that sort of arrogance, how can he possibly fail?

Ireland, too, is a recurring topic. But this is not the romantic, tourist-eye-view offered on the last album; Helen O'Hara's fiddle playing is more discreet and mournful. All these aspects make an important contribution to the elegaic "Knowledge Of Beauty", in which Rowland sings, in classic Scott Walker style, of a sense of heritage rediscovered. It also enters into "One Of Those Things", in many ways the most successful track on the album, encompassing and binding all of the album's many qualities with its humour, its vigorous arrangement, its standard soul backdrop and a sarcastic lyrical shot at the uniformity of pop music. This, in turn, develops into a full-blooded blast at the current trendiness of obscure political causes while the doorstep problem of Ireland is steeped in general ignorance.

After this, the Roxyesque love song "Listen To This" seems remarkably tame, but it's the only dull moment. For there is fire in the belly right from the opening cut, "The Occasional Flicker", which starts as a heart-wrenching personal soliloquy and drifts, almost imperceptibly, into a fierce rock'n'roller before introducing the new Rowland self-mocking his image of martyrdom.

But if "The Occasional Flicker" displays an unexpected wryness, it's nothing on "This Is What She's Like", which parades a rare flair for outright comedy. Another spoken intro – a dialogue between Rowland and Billy Adams that could be a sketch from *Alas Smith And Jones* which continues its comic ways as the music blazes and the lyric adopts the pose of a Mike Leigh play.

Sour old Kevin Rowland has taken his mask off. The soul rebel in him has given us lots of driving sax; the Celtic soul brother in him has given us lots of evocative fiddle; the modern man in him has given us piano (Vincent Crane) and steel guitar (Tommy Evans). The combination is gripping. He's not to be trusted with your life, but he's worth a fiver of your money any day. *Colin Irwin*

The reduced Dexys lineup: (l–r) violinist Helen O'Hara, singer/guitarist Kevin Rowland, saxophonist Nick Gatfield and guitarist Billy Adams

no doubt about it. But the media are aware of what we are trying to do and so are the people who are keen enough on Dexys to buy it in the first few weeks. We have established that, and hopefully the single will now be a hit and a success and the album will follow suit."

Perhaps the whole climate has changed and record-buyers now demand a much higher profile from artists. Or maybe there is a whole new generation of single buyers who have come along and replaced Dexys with yer Durans and yer Wham!s.

"Is that what you're saying? You think that?

Yeah.

"I don't think so. The climate has obviously changed since 1982, and I'm sure that Duran Duran and Wham! fans do want their music immediately accessible in the way you suggest. But Dexys are not in competition with them and never have been. We're not a pop group. I am convinced that there are people who still want to hear good music, no question about it."

But maybe not enough of them, if the album sales are anything to go by.

"Well, I can only repeat what I have just said. I know that the only reason for the LP not setting the charts alight is because we had no single. I asked the record company to take the LP around the radio stations and try to get it played as a single. You know, give it the 20 spins a week on Radio 1 that a single gets, but the stations wouldn't do it. They stuck it on their LP slots at seven o' clock on a Thursday night and nobody heard it. It didn't work, and that was my only miscalculation. You try something different and it is hard to achieve."

> "The LP is the best I have ever done. And it will be a great success"

But you don't think – with the rise of the new pop elite – that perhaps the times may have passed you by? That Dexys' days are over? That the millions who bought "Come On Eileen" have now moved on to different things and forgotten all about you?

"Do you?"

Well, it's the old devil's advocate to an extent, but…

"No, that's what you're saying, so it's your opinion, right? And that's a really fucking stupid thing to say when I've just made the best album I have ever done. I am in the early stages of my career, I'm only just beginning to develop as a singer, I'm 32 years old and I'm not a pop star. You mark my words. This LP will be successful; not the next one, this one. I know it's only because of the single and because the radio stations wouldn't play the album."

But isn't this a bit like blaming the music for everything?

"That's absolute rubbish. Look, I personally believe that the LP is the best I have ever done. The best ever. And it will be a great success. But you don't have to listen to me, you don't have to believe me. I'm saying: mark my words, watch me. Ring me up in six months' time and ask me if it is a success. Anyway, it already is a success; it was a success for me as soon as we finished it. I'm already moving on, but I want this one to do well and I know it will. Watch me."

"How do you feel about Ireland? What do you think about Belfast?"
("One Of Those Things")

THERE ARE A number of references on the album to Ireland. Could you elaborate a bit on all that?

"No."

Don't you feel you should?

"No."

But you can't just leave it at that.

"Why not? In the song, I make a very definite point. And it's simply that it is very easy for most British socialists who pontificate about revolutions far away not to recognise the very obvious point that the most important problem facing them is what's going on in Ireland? It's not for me to say. I'm not a politician."

Yeah, but you must have an opinion.

"An opinion on what?"

An opinion on the political situation in Ireland, particularly the north.

"I'm not here to talk about politics. You work for a music paper. Politics in the *Melody Maker* is a joke."

What about politics in your music?

"Like I say, it is a very specific statement. It doesn't go any further than that and it's not going to."

I think you're running away from the political situation in Ireland.

"How can you possibly say that?"

Because on the song you seem to be getting at British socialists who go on and on about the PLO and Afghanistan but have no opinion on Ireland. Yet you yourself won't even give an opinion.

"What I am saying is that Ireland is the most important thing facing British socialists and that lots of them say very different things but it's all waffle in the end. It's nothing. Nothing ever gets done. You must know that."

I do, but I'm just surprised that YOU don't go any further?

"Why should I? I mention it and that's it. I am not qualified to lecture on Irish politics. Are you?"

Well, if somebody asks me about it, I tell them what I think. And I think that by going on about it in the songs you then owe it to the listener to elaborate a bit about what you really mean. It seems as if all things Irish are important to you and that's it. It honestly doesn't extend to an opinion?

"I'm a musician, not a politician."

But all great music is political.

"Everything's political and there's politics in my music. Always has been. I've got my own opinions on Ireland and that's it."

Do you do anything about the situation there?

"I might and I might not. I don't align myself with any one thing, 'cos I think that is dead stupid for two reasons. Say I aligned myself to CND or Animal Rights, then you get people coming to the shows just because they are into CND and not into Dexys for what it really is; or two, you get kids who are into the music but feel they have to be into the other side of it as well. So, I steer clear of this."

What about Irish music as an influence?

"It has always been there, so obviously it will come out. But what you must understand is that this LP is a complete statement. I don't just sing a line to provoke somebody; it is a complete picture, a complete collection of thoughts and ideas and feelings and knowledge that I have experienced over the last couple of years.

"It's all there in black and white and all the points I want to make are in there. I don't want to elaborate, right?"

I always thought that was what interviews were for.

"I'm here to promote my record. It's as simple as that. It's a commercial decision and nothing else. What else could it be?"

Oh, a debate about your work or something like that…

"Well, I'm already doing that, I'm happily doing that with you. I have »

explained my position on Ireland and I have said a lot more about it than most people ever say."

Less than anyone else who writes about it that I have ever interviewed.

"Listen, I'm not prepared to say any more. The best nationalist music for me has always been the stuff in disguise, when you don't know that it is actually about Ireland at all. I like all strands of music."

Do you go back there much?

"Yes."

Family?

"Yeah."

Are you Irish or British?

"I am an Irish citizen. I am an Irish passport holder."

But you were born in England.

"Just because you were born in a stable doesn't make you a horse."

When you go back, is it like The Pogues, do you get a lot of snobbery from the locals?

"I suppose I get that a bit. But I can see why The Pogues would get a lot of stick. I mean, you might like them, but personally I detest that. It's just playing the drunken Paddy for the Saxon, and I detest it. I find it personally repulsive. Irish people have never been about that, it's just a British myth."

"You're familiar with the scum from Notting Hill, they're called the CND"
("This Is What's She's Like")

CAN YOU HONESTLY say that a line like that is not designed to provoke people?

"I guess it is. To some extent, I allow myself that sort of thing. It's personally the way I feel about CND. I'm sure it provokes people, and that's fine by me."

Would you care to explain why you equate the CND with scum?

"No. What you must understand again is that there always has to be room for an argument. No matter where you are, left or right, you have to have an argument."

Still, it sounds a bit insulting and a bit generalised.

"Well, that's how I feel about the CND. I regard it as a totally ineffective organisation. It's got no working-class involvement, it is totally middle class and it will never be successful until it involves the working classes. I mean, like every sane person, I don't want to get blown up and I support their aims, but, ah…"

I would disagree that the CND has no working-class involvement.

"Very, very little. It's got no trade union involvement, nothing. That particular line came from an experience of mine in Notting Hill where I saw this guy looking into a window. He had all the badges on – 'Nuclear Power, No Thanks' and all that – and this tramp came up to him and asked him for 10 pence and the guy just said no and walked off. I just thought, 'So pathetic', you know?

"It's all conscience-soothing really, nothing more, and totally ineffective. To be effective, the working class has got to be involved, and that way there will be trouble. Clashes with the government and one side will win."

Is that what you would prefer?

"I didn't say that. I just don't feel as strongly about this issue as those people in CND. I have no desire to chain myself to a fence to stop a nuclear war. I don't feel nuclear war is as big a threat as they obviously feel."

One recent example of strong working-class involvement is the miners' strike. Would Dexys have done any benefits?

"Yeah. Because it is an obvious case of helping out people who are short of money. But have you no questions about the music? This is just a political witch-hunt."

It's not meant to sound like that.

"Yes it is, yes it is, and listen, you talk to me about running away from Irish politics and I've said more about Ireland than any other musician, Irish or otherwise, and you, as an Irishman, should be fucking ashamed of yourself the way you let that Mark Smith guy talk to you a few weeks ago."

What?

"You looked so weak, so weak."

That was deliberate.

"Weak. It was pathetic. Somebody with ignorant views like that and he just gave out shit to you, an Irishman, and you didn't say anything about it."

It was designed to read as coming straight from the horse's mouth, damning himself with his own words and no qualifications, you know?

"I just thought it was very weak."

I can't agree and I resent what you've just said. But then you probably resent me accusing you of running away from Ireland, so fair enough. Anyway, there's another line…

"Do you not want to talk about the music? Do you not like the LP or something?"

I do and I'm asking you about your lyrics, which are surely an integral part of your music, and the bits that I find the most interesting.

"Well, alright… What else?…"

"You know the newly wealthy peasants with their home bars and hi-fis"
("This Is What She's Like")

WHAT DO YOU mean?

"Pretty obvious. The nouveau riche, a different people altogether from the middle classes. You can have all the money in the world and not be middle class, or you can have nothing and be really middle class. Didn't you know that?"

Depends how you define class.

"To me, middle class is somebody who starts off with a university education and adopts certain attitudes along the way. Most university graduates end up being middle class and they marry graduates and then their kids are middle class."

So you can't go to university and still be working class?

"You can, of course. But usually end up middle class because you pick up the attitudes when you are there. You get that ridiculous confidence or arrogance at the age of 18 or 22, when you have really done fuck all."

What did you do between 1982 and now?

"It's all there, all on the LP."

Not much point going on then, is there? What could we talk about?

"I don't know. I think I have said plenty already, what do you think?"

I think we should take a break.

"You could say that I'm a bitter man, and once again I think that's true"
("The Occasional Flicker")

I THINK YOU'VE GOT the wrong impression of why I am here.

"Well, the basic fact is that you are from the music press, you write for a music paper and its bad news for you if I am successful."

Why?

"It's bad news for the music press because they don't like Dexys and they don't like me."

But…

"Come on, it's been a two-month hatchet job on me. And they've got to do that because I am not the same as them. I have always been at odds with them and I always will be. It's good for the music press if I am a failure. But I won't be."

You may as well go back to the old days of not talking to us at all and just using ads.

"I don't believe so."

Why, 'cos you enjoy interviews?

"Like I say, I do it for commercial reasons. You want to talk to me about political things and I've done that. But if you're saying the Dexys are running away from politics then you don't know what you are talking about. You haven't got a fucking clue. I'm not bragging, I'm not interested, but Dexys Midnight Runners in its short history has been more political than any other group ever, any of them. Just by the force of our actions.

"Do you know any other group that has withdrawn its labour and succeeded in negotiating a record contract at twice the original amount? That is political action. A group that has lived outside the system, totally outside it for two years, and survived?"

But are you not back in the fold now, with the album, the interviews, the tour, etc?

"That is my job, but it doesn't make me part of the system. I'm not getting at you personally now, but I do have to say again that I have absolutely no respect for the music press. I can't get excited by 18-year-old kids who have experienced fuck all, been nowhere, haven't even worked in most cases, and then they try to tell me about socialism, you know? I went

> "It's good for the music press if I am a failure. But I won't be"

Serious business

MM NOV 23 Dexys' new presentation leaves ardent fans puzzled. Features a policeman. Doesn't feature "Geno".

Kevin Rowland: displaying classic paranoid symptoms

DOMINION THEATRE, LONDON
LIVE!
NOVEMBER 12

YOU KNOW SOMETIMES you want to like someone but they don't make it easy for you? "Yeah, I know what you mean." Like you can understand some of their ideas but not the chip on their shoulder? "Uh-huh, I've met people like that." And you want to tell them to calm it down and stop rubbing people up the wrong way? "Sure, but you can't tell people how to live their lives." So what advice do you give? "Seems like a lot of people don't want to listen to advice."

Not Kevin Rowland anyway. He's obviously proud of the fact, proud of his band. But no man is an island, and pride comes before a fall. Tonight's concert was a superlative event by musical standards, but it won't have won him any friends. When you leave your audience disgruntled and perplexed (a few were even laughing, but the joke was on Kev), you've got to reassess your presentation.

Integrity is just a word if you've got no one else to prove it to. From the off, it was obvious that we were being played to rather than involved. Billy strumming an acoustic at the front of the stage, Kev strolls up ("Cold night, isn't it, Bill?" "Yeah, it's a bad one"), hunkers down to croon a splendidly impassioned version of "I Can't Help Falling In Love With You", the curtain lifts and Dexys skip, hop and jump into gear. No time for idle chit-chat; Kev is into serious business, and you can tell from the scowl on his face that he's not tolerating any displays of flippancy.

Between songs the soul brothers holler for "Geno" and the scowl turns into a thunderous expression of distaste. Feverishly pacing the stage like a caged animal, Rowland is still burning after all these years, but it's his band that makes your jaw drop.

"Come On Eileen" swings through at least 10 tempo variations and precision-stop re-routing, drummer Tim Dancy pacing the others with stop-watch accuracy. A bunch of musos having a good time perhaps, but a thing of beauty to watch. Passion is no ordinary word to Rowland but if the extended vocals of "Knowledge Of Beauty" and "What's She Like" were spectacular, there were also times when his rapping intros with Billy and his rising irritation with the audience (by now stunned into silence) were plain embarrassing.

It was so absurdly comical to watch Helen, dressed like a 40-year-old spinster, clapping and conducting the band with her bow as, behind her, the bass player – incongruously bulging in tight satin strides – boogied into the spotlight at every opportunity and a policeman was wheeled on for "The Occasional Flicker" to charge Kevin with the serious offence of "burning" ("And when exactly did the offence take place, sir?" "'71–76") – an awkward piece of pantomime that again seemed more absurd than appropriate.

Rowland is still burning, but it's his band that makes your jaw drop

Their departure was abrupt and curt. "Adios," he barked as the curtain closed; no encores, please. We left, more dazed than elated. Rowland displayed the classic paranoid symptoms of a man "misunderstood". He seems to harbour grandiose ideas of this own importance and did little to achieve our sympathy.

Helen Fitzgerald

through all that myself at 18 and I don't need it now. Putting politics in your paper or the *NME* is a joke. And all the criticism is water off a duck's back. It doesn't worry me in the slightest. I laugh at the music press. I think you're hilarious."

"*Belfast, Belfast*" *Boney M*
"*Whatever you say, say nothing*" *Seamus Heaney.*

OH, WE TALKED some more about this and that, about how Kevin feels 100 per cent happy with what he is doing now and how right-hand man Billy Adams believes that this is the best lineup ever and how the tour should be really something special. I know it will, because I saw them practising and heard them do a ferocious "This Is What She's Like", a haunting "Knowledge Of Beauty", two typically bizarre cover versions in Quo's "Marguerita Time" and The Fantastics' "Something Old, Something New" and I almost heard enough to wipe the tapes and start again.

But then I thought about some of the things that Kevin had said and I thought how corny a lot of them were and how disappointed I would be when I listened to them later on and how, ultimately, his heart appeared to be in the wrong place and that this was the worst thing of all. So I decided to say cheerio and go home.

The Irish have probably got a word for it, but let's say it was just one of those things. *Barry McIlheney* •

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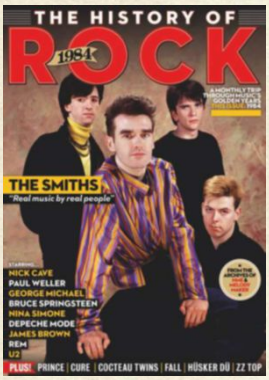

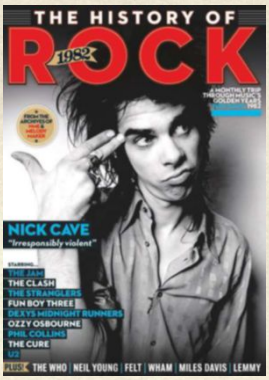

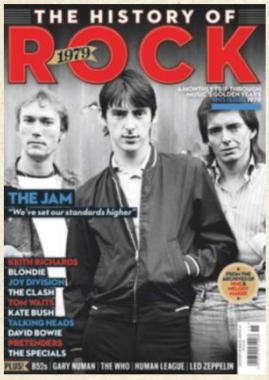

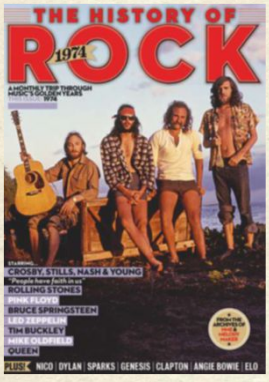

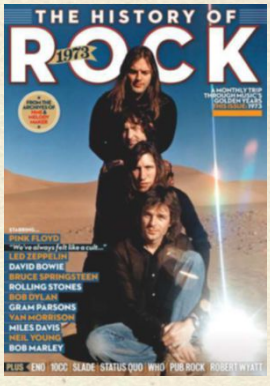

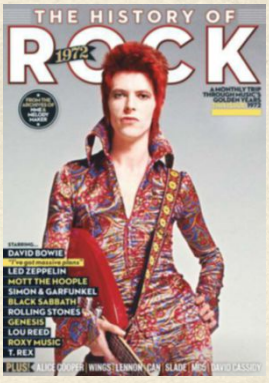

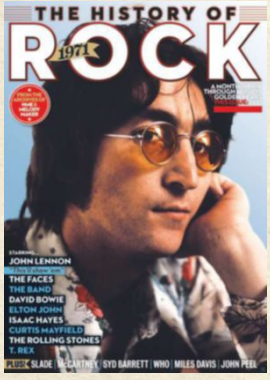

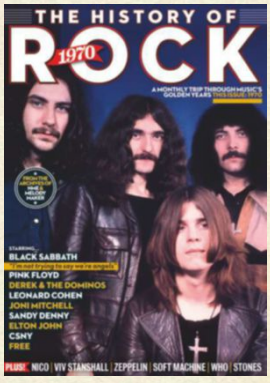

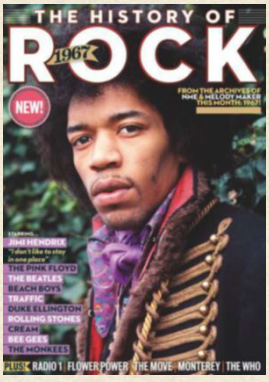

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Readers' letters

MM/NME JUL–DEC Geldof is a hero, "*NME* is bollocks" and other observations.

Nobel effort

Live Aid managed to transcend everyone's expectations, raising over $70 million for famine relief. Bob Geldof mobilised millions of people to say that they will not stand for starvation on our planet when so many of us have so much. While Live Aid's success does not presume for a moment that pop music can save the world, it suggests that it can certainly do more than most governments ever attempt.

What could be better than food for the starving millions in Africa and an end to starvation on our planet? And what could be more deserved than a Nobel Peace Prize for Bob Geldof?

Congratulations to Bob, Band Aid, USA For Africa et al for a job flawlessly done.

ALLISON VILLONE, Larchmont, New York

What about the world – we handed over that $70m! – David Swift **(*NME* Aug 3)**

Alms and the man

The Live Aid concert was a great spectacle and good entertainment. The amount of money raised in such a short time is an achievement in itself and shows the effect the whole thing has had on the people of the world. Whilst our attentions were focused on Live Aid, the faults of our governments are quietly forgotten.

We forget that they have cut back on foreign aid over the last five years, and have done little for this current famine. We forget about giant expenses on arms to destroy the world, which we have allowed our government to get away with.

The £50 million raised by Live Aid is piss in the ocean compared with the defence spending of western governments. Perhaps if we demanded our government give one day's defence spending to the famine appeal, then Live Aid's efforts would not have been necessary as such a large amount of cash could nearly solve the problem.

Live Aid served the government's interests in that they were not asked difficult and unanswerable questions as the people had their minds on the concerts. This situation allowed the government to get away with murder, literally, and makes sure that their capitalist system which causes such things as famine remains intact and unchallenged by the mass of the people.

PAUL DREWER, Benfleet, Essex

Any more like you? – DS **(*NME* Aug 3)**

Ask not for whom the *NME* polls

Shame on you. The most rockist exercise in recent *NME* history, and such a ridiculous result.

So much esoteric nonsense – you know that 90 per cent of your readership has never, and will never, listen to Miles Davis, John Coltrane or Robert Johnson, and Sly And The Family Stone or Suicide are unlikely to receive more than a perfunctory listen for potential hipster value than any consideration through musical merit.

Marvin at Number One? Ho-hum. He may have been the greatest singer of our time, but had (for instance) Stevie Wonder been shot instead of MG, who would be at the top? Not Marvin, and probably not Stevie – both have been responsible for truly uplifting music as well as moments of dire crap ("Savage In The Sack" and "I Just Called…" to name just two), but I doubt the gap between the domination of one and the anonymity of the other would be so wide had circumstances been different.

The *NME* is bollocks.

MARTIN BARDEN, Welwyn Garden City, Herts

You're entitled to your first and last opinions, Martin, but…

If you really believe that 90 per cent of NME *readers have never heard of Mile, Sly, Suicide, etc, then either you have been: a) suffering from a disease that necessitates your ensconcement in an isolated oxygen tent; b) inadvertently reading another music paper; or c) at the Airfix again.*

And personally (I can't speak for the rest of NME*'s crew), I find your arrogant nonsense about Marvin Gaye profoundly offensive, tiresome and splinter-headed.* Midnight Love, *f'rinstance, was* NME*'s LP Of The Year in 1982.*

You, sir, are a clown – Danny Kelly **(*NME* Dec 14)**

…It polls for thee

Thanks for the 100 Best Albums list. It's good to know that at least one music paper treats music as it should be treated, as a cultural heritage rather than a passing trend or here-today-going-tomorrow transient anaesthetic.

However, why is it that of the black LPs in the list more than half are compilations? Have you got yourself accustomed to black music by listening only to your own tape compilations? Can't black artists be considered on the same basis as whites?

One of the top soul albums is by Dexys, while Smokey, Curtis, James, Aretha, etc, are only included as a total career or live "Best Of".

There seems to be no excuse.

BOB HARRIS, The Grave

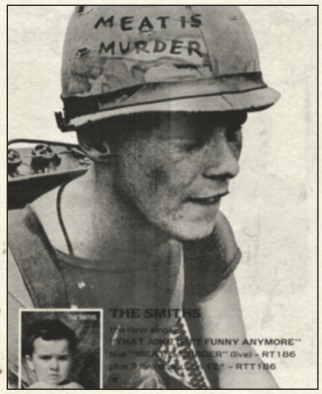
It's precisely to avoid the odd "transient anaesthetic" stuff that compilations were included. To have excluded them would have effectively disqualified swathes of rock'n'roll pioneers and virtually all black '60s acts who were forced to surround their current hit with assorted turkeys and issue the resultant malarkey as an LP. Better the Miracles Anthology *than no Smokey, surely? – DK* **(*NME* Dec 14)**

Negative feedback

Who says The Jesus And Mary Chain can't play well? Me, that's who. They can't play their instruments to save their lives. Ask for singing and you'll get screaming. Then there's that ear-splitting feedback. The Chain gang have no idea at all how to play or perform and maybe that's why they're so fucking brilliant!

CHRISTOPHER WHITEHEAD, Burstall Walk, Bridlington

Sir Chris – I can call you Sir, can't I? – with folks like you around there's hope for us all – Steve Sutherland **(MM Dec 7)**



Coming next... in 1986!

SO THAT WAS 1985. Every night it's just the same.

Certainly, that's not it from our reporters on the beat. The staffers of *NME* and *Melody Maker* enjoyed unrivalled access to the biggest stars of the time, and cultivated a feel for the rhythms of a diversifying scene; as the times changed, so did they. While in pursuit of the truth, they unearthed stories that have come to assume mythical status.

That's very much the territory of this monthly magazine. Each month, *The History Of Rock* will be bringing you verbatim reports from the pivotal events in pop culture, one year a month, one year at a time. Next up, 1986!

BEASTIE BOYS

INTRODUCING THE MOST outrageous band on Def Jam records. "First of all, I don't like intellectual bands, bands who think they know something rather than just wanting to be in a band and have a good time. Like my favourite band of all time is AC/DC," explains producer/label boss Rick Rubin. "Secondly, I don't like bands that have anything to do with politics…"

NICK CAVE

AS STRONG AS Cave's work is, increasingly he has no time whatever for the "scum" – the music journalists who write about him. "It really boils my blood and makes me sick," he tells the latest leech, "to think that this is still perpetuated and the same idiotic process continues, of me speaking a lot of shit to some fool. It's not what I consider profitable."

KEITH RICHARDS

INTERESTING TIMES FOR the Rolling Stones, the band's main figures having played separately from one another at Live Aid. Still, the magic of the band remains intact, according to Keith. "I'll just hammer out some riff, and if the drums pick up and the bass drops in, then maybe we've got something. The Stones rely on that total feel; the rest of it is just salad dressing."

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FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

THE HISTORY OF ROCK 1985

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1985.

"A Cincinnati jacket and a sad luck dame/Hanging out the window with a bottle full of rain…"

Relive the year...

TOM WAITS TOTTERED A LITTLE BIT CLOSER TO THE MAINSTREAM

LIVE AID ROCKED THE WORLD

THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN GENERATED SOME POSITIVE FEEDBACK

…and **MICK JAGGER, ROBERT PLANT, THE POGUES, TOM PETTY, NEIL YOUNG, JONI MITCHELL** and many more shared everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

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